

**PROSPERITY  
NOT AUSTERITY**



**Westminster Manifesto 2015**



### A Better Way

We need to make Northern Ireland work socially, financially and politically. The Stormont House Agreement has only copper-fastened the dependency between our economy and the UK Government. Under the current arrangements we are locked into a subsidy driven existence. The services we can deliver for the people of the North are dictated not by need, but by the amount of money the British Government hands down to Stormont year after year.

The SDLP is offering a simple choice: prosperity not austerity. Over recent years we have been locked into seemingly unending austerity. Year after year we have seen cuts piled upon cuts, budgets have been slashed and services cancelled. This is why the SDLP voted against the most recent budget. We have a choice. We can choose further austerity or choose a prosperity process.

For Northern Ireland to prosper we must take action. The Conservative Party's threat to pull us out of the European Union has left farmers fearing for their future. Jobs have been lost as businesses relocate to ensure that they stay within the EU. Community services, infrastructure projects and north-south enterprises all face an uncertain future due to the Conservative Party's pandering to their Eurosceptic fringe. This isn't good enough. The SDLP firmly believe that Northern Ireland is better off within a united Europe.

The two main parties at the heart of the Stormont Assembly are not delivering politically. Our society remains fragmented, under strain and haunted by our recent past. The Sinn Féin and the DUP partnership has neither the will nor the ability to do anything about it.

That's not good enough. The SDLP don't believe that is good enough for you, for hard-working families or for the generations to come. There is a better way to do politics and we want to deliver a new political programme which will see us move towards a new, shared prosperity. Peace should have been the beginning of a new prosperity programme, instead it became the end game and we haven't moved on since. We can do better. We can all do better.

The SDLP takes our seats in Westminster to uphold the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. We will be there for everyone in the North, ensuring we get the best possible deal for all.

The SDLP will negotiate a New Economic Accord with Westminster, an agreement which recognises that for our economy to grow, the people of the North must be at the heart of that process.

In this manifesto we set out our long-term vision for a new, prosperous and self-sufficient Northern Ireland that is a part of a new, shared and reconciled island. There is a better way. You deserve a new type of politics - we will deliver it.



# Contents

## Jobs and the Economy 3

Building a Prosperous Northern Ireland .....	3
Growing the Economy .....	3
Jobs .....	4
Jobs that Pay .....	5
Jobs in Rural Areas .....	5
Jobs in Tourism .....	6
Jobs and Education .....	6
Jobs and the Public Purse .....	7



## A Shared and Safe Community 8

A Healthy Northern Ireland .....	8
Homes and Housing .....	10
Older People .....	10
Families and Younger People .....	11
Protecting Our Environment .....	11
Agriculture and Rural Development .....	12
Community Safety .....	13
Shared Future .....	14
Justice .....	14
Dealing with the Past .....	15
Regional Development .....	16
Social Security and Welfare Reform .....	16
Welfare Reform .....	16
Culture .....	17
The Irish Language .....	18



## A Northern Ireland that Works 20

Extending Devolution .....	20
Devolution and Equality .....	21
A New Ireland .....	21
Europe .....	22
International Affairs .....	23



## Jobs and the Economy



### Building a Prosperous Northern Ireland

A sustainable and prosperous economy will unlock the solutions to a number of long term socio-economic problems which are holding us back. In this manifesto we will set out how we propose to address major issues in health, education, financing our public services and protecting those who are genuinely in need. However, all of this becomes more achievable in a prosperous Northern Ireland. The best contributor to mental and physical wellbeing, the best counter to long term sickness, is to equip people with the skills they need to secure a job that a prosperous economy will provide. Balanced, sustained prosperity can assist in changing the lives of so many people who

currently feel left behind by society, by the political process and by the economy. It is the reason the SDLP is highlighting the need for a new Prosperity Process.

### Growing the Economy

The SDLP has for many years supported the devolution of corporation tax powers. However, corporation tax on its own will not bring the growth we need. We must seek access to all the tools we need to repair our economy. If we are to attract high quality jobs through inward investment then we need to ensure we have a suitably qualified skills pool to take up these opportunities. We also need to address urgently infrastructure imbalances to ensure that

economic growth is not centred exclusively on Belfast but is regionally balanced.

We recognise the new challenges that increased fiscal powers will bring, not least the potential variance of the Northern Ireland block grant, but we believe our abilities are more than enough for this challenge. The SDLP believe this major step can set the local economy on a new trajectory. Only full control of our finances will allow us to have full control of our future.

The Northern Ireland economy is unbalanced and our private sector is under-developed. We need the private sector and its contribution to the economy, more of the same poor economic governance will only hold us back.

The SDLP will establish, in partnership with the British government, a Scottish-style commission to begin the devolution of further powers which will allow us to take control of additional fiscal levers.

Through this mechanism Scotland has succeeded in winning the argument to allow them to borrow money and issue their own bonds. The same powers should be extended to Northern Ireland to enable us to stimulate our private sector through infrastructure projects.

## Jobs

To tackle unemployment we must strengthen policies which allow people to get to work. We need to attract and create not only more jobs but higher-paying jobs in Northern Ireland.

The emigration of young people is a major issue for Northern Ireland, with more and more young people going abroad to find jobs, study and eventually settle.

Our highly skilled and innovative workforce consistently proves itself to be capable of producing the goods. We must reward this achievement by attracting better, more sustainable, high value jobs both through Foreign Direct Investment and also by supporting and encouraging indigenous small and medium enterprises.

## Pledges

### *To create jobs we will:*

- Seek the devolution of further fiscal powers so we can offer flexibility and incentives to businesses to encourage investment in people.

- Fight for an enhanced all-island approach to ensure no part of the North is left behind.
- Seek a dedicated and joined-up approach from all areas of government to the creation of jobs.
- Focus job creation projects on small and medium firms and new businesses engaged in innovation. We will also work with overseas friends and contacts to assist Northern Ireland firms to enhance their export activity. There remains in place an international reservoir of goodwill towards the North and we will seek to make that work for our economy.
- Press the Executive to fulfil its infrastructural commitments and ensure regional investment.
- Reform public procurement so it becomes more accessible to small local businesses, eliminate red tape and ensure prompt

payment to firms working on government contracts.

- Seek a targeted construction scheme to increase the availability of grade A office space available across the North.
- Introduce a comprehensive industrial strategy to develop advanced manufacturing and leading-edge service industries.
- Build and retrofit more social housing – creating jobs and assisting the vulnerable.
- Invest in roads maintenance – creating jobs and assisting business transport.
- Ensure affordable childcare provision that allows parents the choice of going back into work.
- Put the need for the Prosperity Process, which will lift all of our people, at the centre of all policies.



## Jobs that Pay

Recent reports have shown that 50% of families living in poverty in Northern Ireland have at least one family member working. It is clear that work is no longer a guaranteed route out of poverty. The SDLP believe that Northern Ireland needs more higher paying jobs.

The Living Wage is one way of ensuring work is a route out of poverty. SDLP led the way in making Belfast City Council the first Living Wage Council in Ireland.

The SDLP has campaigned for the proper regulation of Zero Hour Contracts and for Northern Ireland to lead the way by introducing legal protections for those on Zero-Hour contracts.

## Jobs in Rural Areas

Supporting the continuation of sustainable farming helps maintain the countryside, contributes to rural development and helps us create a diverse economy required for prosperity.

We need specific protection for smaller farmers for environmental as well as economic reasons. It's in all our interests to protect our ability to buy local produce and support local producers.

We will strive to ensure the rural environment remains a place in which people wish to live and work.

By securing equal and fair access to public services, maintaining normal service provision and social amenities we can prevent people from feeling isolated.



The SDLP has been instrumental in campaigning for "rural-proofing" of all government policies to ensure that rural communities are not disadvantaged. SDLP fully support the implementation of a statutory Rural Proofing Bill.

### *To create rural jobs we will:*

- Work in conjunction with others to ensure the Conservative Party does not jeopardise access to the Single Farm Payment under the Common Agricultural Policy by threatening to withdraw from Europe.
- Ensure provision of high quality public services in rural areas to promote economic independence and equality, minimise rural exclusion and combat isolation.

- Fight for quality rural childcare provision to enable those parents who want to work the freedom to do so.
- Work to ensure the British government also represents our fishing industry. Northern Ireland's needs in agriculture and fishing are often better represented by the Irish government during European negotiations on fish quotas. We will work to ensure the British Government does not undercut Irish farming and fishing industries.
- Pursue the development of a healthy indigenous renewable energy industry to contribute to sustaining our rural economy.
- Encourage the development of small scale renewables to enable those in rural areas to create their own energy and gain the benefits from feed-in tariffs.

- Enhance opportunities for farm diversification.
- Continue our commitment to decentralisation of public sector jobs to rural areas.
- Provide incentives for development of rural micro-engineering schemes.
- Enable greater opportunities for development of the forestry industry and native timber businesses.
- Ensure rural transportation networks provide for business and community needs.
- Support rural schools and healthcare provision to ensure rural dwellers can remain in their communities.
- Ensure full expansion of the high-speed broadband network in order to eliminate the digital imbalance across the North.

## Jobs in Tourism

Northern Ireland offers a lot and can benefit hugely from tourism.

The tourism industry provides a living for thousands of people across Northern Ireland, particularly in coastal towns. Tourism in the North is worth over £720 million to the local economy, and is responsible for 43,000 jobs. It can go much further as a driver of investment and employment.

The SDLP recognise the enormous potential of tourism to stimulate Northern Ireland's economy and to create much needed jobs.

## The SDLP will:

- Reduce the rate of Northern Ireland's VAT rate to 5% in the tourism and hospitality sectors. This reduction could see the number of jobs within hotels grow by 40% by 2020.
- Develop the River Bann and the Fermanagh Lakelands as a major growth element in water and recreation tourism. This would stimulate hospitality and open up towns along our waterways.
- Ensure development of our cultural tourism and nurture closer links with Scotland and the islands.
- Support local government in developing effective tourism strategies including taking advantage of the tourism potential of our built heritage.

## Jobs and Education

Education is an investment in our children's future. Education is also key to achieving both social justice and long-term prosperity. However our current educational system is failing both our children and our society. Currently the percentage of people in Northern Ireland reporting that they have no qualifications is 18.3%, nearly double the UK average of 9.9%.

We must encourage children to take up STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) at all levels of ability in order to provide our children and subsequently, our businesses, with the necessary skills base to prosper.

The SDLP believe that it is essential to ensure that the curriculum across all stages of schooling is forward-focused and we will make it a priority to deliver coding to pupils at the earliest opportunity. Children in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to be taught computer programming from the age of 8.



Seven years and £16 million were wasted on the now defunct Education and Skills Authority Bill because of the DUP and Sinn Féin's inability to agree. The SDLP fought hard to ensure that the Education Authority will now be truly representative of our unique educational landscape. Irish-medium education and the voluntary grammar and integrated sectors are now all represented at board level.

The SDLP voted against the massive increase in the tuition fees cap which will restrict access to education for young people. We believe that barriers to accessing education must be removed. For Northern Ireland to compete in a global market and to end the 'brain drain' of young people going abroad to work and study, we must expand higher education.

The expansion of the Ulster University at Magee is critical to the North West's future economic prosperity. This is a key economic driver that will help to address regional imbalance. The SDLP will not stop in its fight for the expansion of Magee to 10,000 student places.

Additional investment is needed to address the attainment gap and educational inequalities and to support a skills and training programme to ensure that we have a 21st century workforce.

“ *The SDLP voted against the massive increase in the tuition fees cap which will restrict access to education for young people.* ”



### We will

- Introduce a comprehensive early years strategy.
- support positive school reforms while protecting schools from arbitrary closures.
- Invest in a safe and comprehensive school transport system that will provide for equal rights to 'home to school transport'.
- Improve focus on literacy and numeracy skills in the primary cycle to prevent educational inequalities developing at later stages.
- Build upon the cross-border cooperation between colleges and universities to meet the needs of students and business.

### Jobs and the Public Purse

We need a simpler, more flexible public procurement process so that local businesses can work in partnership with the public sector. Public procurement spending amounts to £2.6 billion in Northern Ireland annually. The SDLP will continue to support social clauses in public procurement contracts to ensure that local businesses and the community benefit.

The EU public procurement directives adopted in January 2014 allow for social clauses to be inserted into public contracts to help address social inequalities while maintaining a value for money approach.

Only 14% of small and medium enterprises across the island of Ireland have bid for a public sector contract in the last 12 months, with less than a quarter of firms surveyed having bid for a tender on a cross-border basis.

## A Shared and Safe Community



### A Healthy Northern Ireland

The SDLP has been clear and consistent on the need to implement a change agenda in our Health Service if we are to ensure it is fit for the 21st century and for future generations. But the reforms in the 'Transforming Your Care' plan have not been properly funded. This has resulted in increased pressure in the health system and failed outcomes for healthcare staff, patients and the public.

A series of recent independent reports agree with the SDLP that the community side of healthcare is not being properly funded. Three years of ministerial complacency has failed patients and left the health service in a strategic void.

The Health Minister has previously said that there is no money left in the Health Service purse to pursue reform.

The SDLP believe in bolstering the community and voluntary sectors and exploring innovative joined-up ways in which it can alleviate pressure from the sharp end of A&E provision.

Working like this offers not only the potential for better and more effective treatment for patients, but also huge potential in terms of jobs and the economy. In addition more investment is needed in medical technologies and drugs development.

The SDLP will continue to campaign for access to a broader range of cancer drugs

The SDLP recognise the benefits that North-South working provides for economic co-operation, political co-operation and reconciliation. We have seen the benefit of a joined-up approach to paediatric cardiac surgery, by working with the Health Minister in the South our children with urgent heart surgery requirements will no longer have to travel to England. That approach can be replicated across other health services.

Furthermore we would increase provisions for North-South Healthcare including a joined-up approach to ambulance service provision in the border areas.

The SDLP has been at the forefront in defending our health service from Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Specifically the SDLP has sounded the alarm and continues to campaign against the inclusion of investor state dispute settlements. The SDLP has supported the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products and wish to see further preventative campaigns. We remain committed to greater action on preventative health and keeping people out of hospital.

“ *A man living in Lagan Valley can expect to live 6.6 years longer than a man living in west Belfast. The SDLP will move to end all forms of health inequality.* ”



Investing in health promotion, primary care and tackling health inequalities is crucial if we are to reduce the burden on acute care. The SDLP want to see an increase in our health budget for preventative spending so that it accounts for 4% of the overall budget.

Furthermore the SDLP is calling for an Executive programme fund to be established to initiate a long-term, cross-departmental preventative health strategy. In this way a meaningful process can be embarked upon that will address the stark health inequalities here in a consistent way.

A greater focus should be placed on preventative health spending in order to tackle financial, personal and social costs to patients and our health and social care system.

Today, more than 60% of adults and over a quarter of children are either overweight or

obese. People are living longer and our health service needs to be able to keep up with rising demands on frontline services.

Belfast and the North is divided by health inequality. North, east, west Belfast suffer from some of the lowest life expectancies in Northern Ireland. A man living in Lagan Valley can expect to live 6.6 years longer than a man living in west Belfast. The SDLP will move to end all forms of health inequality.

The public must be more aware of the impact their lifestyle has on their health. The SDLP will continue to encourage people to adopt healthier eating and drinking habits, exercise more and give up smoking, in this way we can greatly improve longer-term health outcomes.

The way we deliver our health services and care for our sick says a lot about our society. We will have the vision and the courage to take a longer

term view of how health is both resourced and administered in the North and on an all-Ireland basis. This is an area where 'joined up Government' has to be more than an empty phrase. A successful Prosperity Process will unlock government resources and assist individuals to address their own long term mental and physical wellbeing.

## Homes and Housing

The fair provision of social housing was one of the founding principles of the SDLP. The SDLP has been and remains at the forefront of housing reform. We continue to fight against long waiting lists, high levels of housing stress and rising homelessness.

The SDLP will prioritise an increase in the supply of social housing and ensure that allocation is fair and based on need. Furthermore, the SDLP will champion creative and innovative housing policies and strategies and tailor them to the North's specific needs.

The SDLP also recognise that the private rented sector is growing in Northern Ireland and is largely unregulated. We see a need to license landlords and letting agents to ensure they are fully informed of their responsibilities and duties. This would also protect and enhance their relationships with their tenants.

## Older People

Our Prosperity Process will embrace all sections of our community, including older people who have real needs and concerns.

The SDLP believe that the good health, independence and well-being of senior citizens

must be a core priority, and we're concerned that today's older people are being forced to live on insufficient pensions and often in fuel poverty.

The SDLP has shown our commitment to tackling fuel poverty by ensuring that the Assembly and Executive to address this widening and deepening problem, showing that the Executive must not merely leave the job of tackling fuel poverty to energy companies.

In Northern Ireland the most recent figures available show there have been approximately 600 excess winter deaths recorded, an increase of 20% on the previous year. 42% or 294,000 homes in Northern Ireland experience fuel poverty with the figure rising to 62% for older people. The SDLP has called for the extension of the Warm Homes Discount Scheme to Northern Ireland.

We are committed to enhancing the provision of care for the elderly, and have called for a model similar to those already in place for child care. This is all the more important in light of our ageing population.

The SDLP want to see an end to discrimination against older people in the workplace. As well as being grossly unjust, such discrimination is costly and inefficient.

### *In the coming parliament we will:*

- Continue to campaign for the immediate restoration of the earnings link for the state pension.
- Fight for the winter fuel payment to be increased to £500.
- Show respect to our older generation by putting an end to upper age limits in work and insurance.



- Call for specific support for older and disabled jobseekers.
- Ensure the automatic payment of benefits.
- Push for the reinstatement of the Executive Programme Funds to support cross-cutting community issues.
- Fight for the introduction of social tariffs on energy provision for older people and disabled people.
- Press the Rural Development Minister to make available the funds needed to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion.
- Continue to press OFMDFM to deliver on the Executive's anti-poverty commitments and for Northern Ireland specific child poverty targets.
- Ensure access to Essential Skills, Apprenticeships and Lifelong Learning for all.
- Tackle the lack of appropriate independent and supported living opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Provide better access to meaningful daytime activities and support in finding appropriate job opportunities for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems.

### Families and Younger People

Our children and young people deserve every opportunity we can offer them.



The SDLP believe that one of the key barriers to people re-entering the workforce is the disproportionate cost of childcare services.

Almost half of parents in Northern Ireland are unsure of the help they are entitled to receive and almost 50% had reduced their work hours or given up work altogether because of the lack of affordable childcare. The SDLP support the provision of independent welfare advice for young families.

The SDLP will call for a reform of the welfare system that doesn't punish young families but offers parents, and particularly mothers, the opportunity and support for re-entering the workforce.

The SDLP will continue to call for the introduction of a comprehensive childcare strategy as promised in the most recent Programme for Government.

As part of the reform of the Assembly the SDLP will campaign for a single department incorporating the health and educational aspects of affordable childcare.

### Protecting our Environment

The SDLP is committed to the protection and promotion of our environment and continues to campaign to manage the many pressing demands of climate change, land use change, habitat destruction, pollution of our rivers and waterways and waste disposal.

We believe that the environment and the economy should not, and cannot, be at loggerheads and that a vibrant, sustainable environment can be a driver of prosperity and job creation. Our vision is for a better environment and a stronger economy.

At Westminster and in the Assembly we have supported legislation and measures to encourage business and communities to protect and promote the environment. We have introduced the carrier bag levy that has reduced the use of these bags by 72% and raised over £4m for local environment and community projects. Under our watch, every school in the North is now an Eco-School. We have supported the development of renewable energy and have ensured that fracking will be kept out of the North until there is clear evidence that it is safe for people and the environment.

We will continue to push for economic incentives to exploit our natural resources such as wind, water, afforestation, and provide employment through sustainable technologies. We are committed to an all-island waste strategy with innovative strategies and incentives to encourage recycling and to tackle the scourge of fuel laundering and waste crime.

*“ We have introduced the carrier bag levy that has reduced the use of these bags by 72% and raised over £4m for local environment and community projects. Under our watch, every school in the North is now an Eco-School – the first region in the world to achieve 100%.”*

### **We will**

- introduce a Climate Change Bill in the Assembly and resist any attempt at Westminster to row back on carbon emission targets.
- press for a new Green Investment Deal for Northern Ireland to retrofit and insulate homes and to support small and medium enterprises to save energy and invest in resource efficient technologies.
- press for support for a research and development hub in the North for low energy carbon products.
- support the investment of European funding into renewable energy, energy efficiency and waste projects.

- work with the British and Irish governments, through an organized Crime Task Force to tackle fuel laundering and waste crime.
- call for an all-island Environment Protection Agency.

## **Agriculture and Rural Development**

### **Agri-food**

The agri-food sector is one of Northern Ireland's greatest success stories and we believe it remains a vital part in creating a stronger rural economy. We oppose the disastrous cuts to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) budget as they represent a serious blow to the agri-food sector's future potential.





We aim to reverse the cuts that would see its 800 staff, most of whom are engaged in advanced research and development, reduced to 400.

The SDLP believe it is completely misguided from a strategic perspective to impose restrictive development cuts on a growing sector as it will seriously obstruct the vital commercial fieldwork research they undertake.

The SDLP recognise the importance of having an internationally competitive agri-food industry and we aim to ensure the agri-food sector is protected and nurtured for future growth. It is vital that the “Going for Growth” strategy is properly implemented with farmer interests being duly recognised alongside those of other food chain stakeholders.

### **Prices in Beef**

SDLP MP Margaret Ritchie is the voice of Ireland on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee at Westminster and strongly defends the reputation and high standards of Ireland’s beef industry North and South.

The beef industry, both North and South, has historically worked in partnership for our mutual benefit. The SDLP aim to maximise North-South cooperation in the whole field of agriculture and food processing. The SDLP believe through partnership with the Republic Northern Ireland beef will be able take advantage of a newly opened market for Irish beef in the USA.

The SDLP see sustainable export markets for Northern Ireland agriculture products as key to growing this sector even further. The SDLP strongly advocate that DARD become more centrally involved in supporting exports of agricultural products beyond the EU and in particular markets such as China, Japan and the USA.

The SDLP believe that DARD must be more proactive in securing agreement with the London Government to get export licenses so that the North can market on an equal footing beyond the EU.

The SDLP support efforts to get EU intervention schemes activated on a temporary basis in order to help stabilise farm-gate prices for milk and pork products and protect the farm based primary producer from the market volatility affecting farm gate prices.

Crucially, the British Government does not grasp the character of Irish farming. The threat of a British exit from the European Union has already caused fear in the farming community. Our farmers stand to gain much more within Europe than outside.

### **The SDLP**

- has been a strong voice representing farmers and fisheries in Westminster.
- has ensured local considerations were heard during the vital CAP reform debate.
- called for improved broadband services, to support increasingly important e-commerce in rural areas.
- want a simplified and accessible CAP Online Application support system.
- want better mobile phone coverage to stop the ‘digital divide’ that disadvantages those in rural areas.

### **Community Safety**

We remain committed to combating crime and ensuring safer communities for everybody. We will protect frontline policing and ensure that the police service is rooted in our community. We will ensure that there will be visible policing on our streets, with 24 hour access to police stations.

The SDLP believe that the Policing Community Safety Partnerships should be open and transparent to help ensure that local communities have a greater say over local policing issues. We will ensure that the PCSPs

consult and engage more frequently with the local community on policing and community safety issues.

Cross-border policing must be stepped up to demonstrate the benefits of enhanced North-South integration. We will continue to demand an all-Ireland sex offenders' register and we will work with our counterparts in the South to ensure that victims and survivors have the information and support that they need to deal with the repercussions of domestic and sexual abuse.

## Shared Future

The SDLP is committed to creating a shared future for every citizen in Northern Ireland. We want to foster a sense of belonging and ownership among our people by providing them with every opportunity to secure a job or receive the training needed to be part of the new Prosperity Process.

The majority of people here appreciate the social and economic case for a Shared Future. Reconciliation and inclusion in our society has moved beyond unionism and nationalism. There are new communities in Northern Ireland who are part of our journey to a fully inclusive society. The diverse traditions and cultures in our society need to be celebrated, respected and shared.

However, 17 years after the Good Friday Agreement, contentious issues remain. Mutual respect is needed for our society to move forward. A robust code of conduct is required for participants on parades and demonstrations, outlining how they should



conduct themselves, particularly outside homes, schools and churches

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

### *The SDLP will:*

- Fight to ensure the Commission on Flags, Identity and the Past and the Civic Advisory Panel are truly representative of our civic society.

- Continue to strive for a comprehensive and ethical approach to the past, demand stronger parade legislation, seek equality on official flags and call for greater recognition of all of our identities and traditions.
- Continue to defend human and equality rights and seek a robust, updated race equality law.

## Justice

The SDLP demand the highest accountability from the security services. We alone secured important oversight mechanisms for the National Crime Agency. These included provisions that the Police Ombudsman can use the full range of its powers, that the PSNI must

agree to NCA intelligence activities, that NCA officers will be subject to the same Code of Ethics as the PSNI, and vitally we secured a full and proper role for the Policing Board to scrutinise NCA operations.

Now that these new accountability mechanisms are in place it is time for the NCA to target criminal gangs and organised crime. The SDLP will work with the British and Irish Governments to tackle organised crime through the establishment of an all-island Organised Crime Taskforce. Smuggling, fuel laundering and human trafficking are cross-border crimes and require a cross border approach to stop them.

The Chief Constable of the PSNI has made clear on a number of occasions that the policing budget is under an immense amount of strain. It is time to work in partnership with police services across these two islands to ensure that people are safe and secure.

The SDLP will continue the fight for protections against cuts to legal aid and the closure of courthouses such as in Enniskillen, to ensure that everyone has access to the highest standards of justice.

The SDLP sought to amend the Modern Slavery Bill to provide for independent child guardians to represent the best interests of the child in all dealings with relevant authorities and services.

### Dealing with the Past

The SDLP's concerns at the time about secret deals between Sinn Féin and the Blair Government were confirmed by the revelation of the On-The-Runs administrative scheme.



The damage caused to the integrity of the peace process and the reputation of the justice system by this scheme must be repaired.

It was SDLP opposition that forced Sinn Féin and the British Government to drop the On-The-Run legislation which betrayed every single victim in Northern Ireland.

Governments and agencies must prove that no one and no organisations are off-limits or receive a light touch or back-room deals on criminal assets. The SDLP believe that when it comes to dealing with the past, disclosure, truth and accountability are non-negotiable. We will continue to push for a comprehensive human rights compliant process to deal with all aspects of the conflict.

The SDLP has ensured that the voices of victims have been heard by the British Government. We supported the campaigns for truth and justice for the victims of the troubles while in Westminster. We have demanded answers from the UK government on:

- The Billy Wright inquiry and the police investigation into the Loughinisland massacre.
- The murders of Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson.
- Bloody Sunday, including securing an apology from the British Government.

## Regional Development

The serious issue of regional imbalance has been neglected by the DUP and Sinn Féin. Areas west of the Bann have been overlooked in terms of investment, infrastructure and job creation. The whole of Northern Ireland suffers from regional imbalance and the SDLP will not accept it.

The SDLP has been a vocal advocate for the Derry-Belfast train line and has repeatedly called the Minister for Regional Development to account over unjustifiable delays. We will continue to push the case for an all-Ireland rail network to Dublin and beyond by reopening the Knockmore-Lisburn rail link and restoring a rail link between Armagh and Portadown.

It is essential that the long overdue upgrade of the A6 road from Belfast to Derry, including the bypass at Dungiven, is delivered. Derry is the North's second city yet it lacks the much needed modern infrastructure to attract investment and stimulate job creation.

## Welfare Reform

The SDLP is the only party that has consistently opposed the Tories' Welfare Reform at Westminster and in the Assembly. These are cuts masquerading as reform, which have relied on a narrative that sets the unemployed and disabled against the working poor and hard-pressed families.

The SDLP negotiated long and hard in Stormont House to get the best mitigation possible for the people of Northern Ireland. We made the British Government acknowledge the unique situation here. The SDLP tabled over 30

amendments to the Bill, all of which were voted down by Sinn Féin and the DUP. These amendments would have seen a statutory entitlement to free, independent advice for claimants, further mitigation of sanctions and, most importantly, the abolition of the iniquitous Bedroom Tax.

The Tories have said their first act, if re-elected, will be to reduce the benefit cap even further to £23,000. The SDLP will be there at Westminster to oppose any future cuts that attack the unemployed, the sick and disabled and hard-pressed families.

The SDLP successfully led the campaign to have the Independent Living Fund maintained in Northern Ireland.

- The SDLP is the only party that has consistently opposed the Tories' Welfare Reform at Westminster and in the Assembly.
- In the Assembly the SDLP tabled over 30 amendments to the Bill, all of which were voted down by Sinn Féin and the DUP.
- These amendments would have seen a statutory entitlement to free, independent advice for claimants; further mitigation of sanctions and, most vitally, the abolition of the iniquitous bedroom tax.



## Culture

The SDLP recognise the unique role that sport in general plays within communities in the context of health promotion, tackling social exclusion, crime and underachievement. This is the case, especially in deprived areas.

The SDLP will continue to support sustained investment in grassroots sports infrastructure in football, GAA, rugby and other popular sports.

The SDLP is working on behalf of people with disabilities to ensure that all entertainment venues are not only accessible but disability friendly.

The SDLP led a vigorous campaign against proposed cuts that would have seen many of our local libraries closed to the public. The SDLP worked with Libraries NI to not only keep many libraries open, but to regenerate libraries in rural areas such as the newly opened library in Kilkeel. The SDLP is continuing to support the regeneration of Belfast Central Library and is calling for the Minister to move the project forward.

The SDLP has been working to promote the need for defibrillators to be available at sporting grounds and entertainment events and for staff to be trained in the use of defibrillators and CPR. The SDLP is working with 'Defibs4kids' to develop a strategy for future implementation. The SDLP actively supported the investigation by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on the topic of child protection and safeguarding in sport.

We have a huge wealth of cultural talent in Ireland built on a rich creative and artistic



heritage. Many Northern Irish poets, novelists, musicians and actors are world renowned. Belfast Councillors Claire Hanna and Nichola Mallon were responsible for the recent bestowing upon Michael Longley the freedom of his native Belfast.

The SDLP believe that the arts sector here needs to be protected in the wake of unprecedented pressures on the budget caused by a DUP and Sinn Féin led austerity agenda.

Alongside the protection of our cultural identity, there are sound economic reasons to protect the arts long term. Every £1 invested by the Arts Council generates a return of £3 for the local economy.

The SDLP believe that instead of cutting arts funding and reducing creative opportunities as a result, we should nurture local talent in order to develop a sustainable indigenous creative industry.

*“The SDLP recognise the unique role that sport in general plays within communities in the context of health promotion, tackling social exclusion, crime and underachievement.”*

## An Ghaeilge

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

- Tacaíonn an SDLP le hAcht na Gaeilge atá cuimsitheach, bunaithe ar chur chuige atá dírithe ar chearta agus a dhéanfaidh teanga oifigiúil den Ghaeilge agus a bhronnfaidh cearta fiúntacha ar chainteoirí na teanga i réimsí éagsúla – na hinstiúidí polaitiúla, an rialtas áitiúil, córas an cheartais, oideachas, agus na meáin chumarsáide ina measc.
- Creideann an SDLP gur cheart dá gcuirfí an tAcht i bhfeidhm thall i Westminster sa dóigh is go mbeadh cumhachtaí ar leith a bhaineann le Westminster, faoi údarás an Achte, mar shampla cúrsaí craolcháin.

- Maoiniú leanúnach do Chomhairle na Gaelscolaíochta a thacóidh le tuismitheoirí an Ghaeloideachais a fhorbairt.
- Maoiniú d'lontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta chun ciste a bhunú le tacú le gaelscoileanna nua.
- Maoiniú le háiseanna a fhorbairt chun tacú leis an Teidlíocht Oideachais a chur i bhfeidhm in earnáil na Gaelscolaíochta.
- Maoiniú le haghaidh foirgnimh bhuna a chur ar fáil do naiscoileanna in earnáil an Ghaeloideachais.
- Maoiniú le tacaíocht leanúnach a chur ar fáil d'fhorbairt na réamhscolaíochta in earnáil an Ghaeloideachais.
- Cúrsaí Gaeilge a fhorbairt do bhunscoileanna lán-Bhéarla.
- Oiliúint inseirbhíse leanúnach a chur ar fáil do mhúinteoirí Gaeilge sna scoileanna sin.

- Soláthar téacsleabhar, bogearraí, agus áiseanna 'ar líne' do scoileanna, atá ag firstean do chumais agus d'aoiseanna na ndaltaí a bheas á n-úsáid.
- Soláthar cuí do theagasc na Gaeilge mar ábhar do dhaltaí meánscoile a fuair a gcuid oideachais (nó roinnt de) trí mheán na Gaeilge.
- An Ghaeilge a bheith aitheanta i mBille na gCeart.
- Níos mó maoinithe a chur ar fáil don chiste scannánaíochta agus teilifíse.
- Níos mó maoinithe a chur ar fáil d'Fhoras na Gaeilge a chuideoidh leis an teanga a fhorbairt ar fud na hÉireann.
- Cinntiú go mbeidh RTÉ agus TG4 ar fáil d'iomlán na tíre a dhéanfaidh cinnte de go mbeidh forbairt agus rath ar an Ghaeilge sa ré dhigiteach



## The Irish language

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

- The SDLP support a comprehensive Irish Language Act based on a rights-oriented approach and which officially recognises the Irish language and confers valuable rights for speakers of the language in various fields: political institutions, local government, the justice system education, and the media;
- The SDLP believe that an Irish Language Act should apply in Westminster to ensure that particular powers that Westminster has retained, such as broadcasting, are covered by the Act.

### *The SDLP calls for:*

- Continued funding from the Council to support parents in Irish Medium Education development.
- Funding for permanent buildings available for the Irish-medium preschool sector.
- Funding for ongoing support for the development of Irish Medium pre-school sector.
- Development of courses for English-medium schools.
- Continuous training for Irish teachers in schools.
- Provision of textbooks, software and on line facilities for schools which are suited to the abilities and ages of the students.

- Appropriate provision for the teaching of Irish as a subject for secondary school students who received their education (or some of their education) through Irish.
- That the Irish language is fully recognised in the Bill of Rights.
- That more funding is made available for a dedicated film and television fund;
- That more funding be made available to help with the development of the language throughout Ireland.
- That the availability of RTÉ and TG4 is extended, which will support the development and success of the medium in the digital age.

“

*The SDLP support a comprehensive Irish Language Act*

”



## A Northern Ireland that works



The last few years have seen a return to crisis after crisis. Political instability is putting investors off, preventing the tough decisions from being made and preventing progress being made on a broad range of issues.

The SDLP has always offered more than sectarian tribal politics. We want to see devolution deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

“ *Political instability is putting investors off* ”

### Extending Devolution

The SDLP will continue its campaign to extend the powers available to the people of the North.

We will continue to fight for the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and its commitments on human rights, equality, victims, community relations, the Irish language and North-South cooperation.

As well as full fiscal powers the SDLP will demand the extension of further powers to Northern Ireland including:

- Broadcasting, telecommunications and the internet
- Aviation
- Foreshore and seabed resource rights
- National insurance and minimum wage
- Energy and minerals resources
- Drug policy
- Local elections
- Lottery spending
- Consumer protection

## Devolution and Equality

The SDLP is committed to promoting equality, social justice and reconciliation, and to protecting human rights. These principles are not just slogans, they are a part of our founding philosophy.

We are proud to stand up for the rights of all in our society regardless of sex, race, ethnic or social origin, language, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The SDLP has voted in favour of equal marriage and will continue to work tirelessly to make Northern Ireland a progressive and inclusive place to live.

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

The SDLP celebrate the fact that Northern Ireland is an increasingly diverse society. Unfortunately hate crimes and racist attacks occur much too often, threatening any attempts to build a fully inclusive and shared society.

OFMdFM have finally consulted on the long-overdue Racial Equality Strategy, which has not been updated since 2005. The SDLP will fight for robust race equality laws that will allow everyone in Northern Ireland to feel safe in their own homes and communities.

The SDLP will continue our sustained lobbying for a strong Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. We remain convinced that a Bill of Rights can support the common ground that does exist in



our society, and provide protections and principles upon which we can agree despite our differences.

On such common ground we can build a truly shared future.

## A New Ireland

The SDLP is committed to a united, reconciled and just Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement established the democratic basis for unity and by providing the public with a credible and achievable vision, we believe, we are the only

party, credibly placed, to bring about unity among the people of Ireland.

A prosperous Northern Ireland will be confident and self-assured and this is the only route to a reconciled, just new Ireland.

The SDLP envisages unity as a merger between two equal partners. In a united Ireland we see the continuation of a Stormont Assembly and we see the same rights and protections that the SDLP delivered as part of the Good Friday Agreement applying in support of minorities in a new all-island arrangement.

In the SDLP's new Ireland we will see the same level of public services, in the provision of health and education and support for the most vulnerable.

## Europe

Northern Ireland's economy is intertwined with the European Union. The total funding received

from Europe amounts to over £7.5 billion including £2.7 billion for farmers and fishermen.

The SDLP is the only major pro-European party in Northern Ireland. Membership of the European Union has allowed for a cultural enrichment, access for Northern Ireland's producers to a market of 500 million people and access to funds and support which run into the billions.

The EU enabled the free flow of people, of ideas, of trade and opportunity right across this island, between these islands and across the European continent.

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

We have already seen the economic damage done by the threats of a British exit. Should these threats become a reality much of the progress made in Northern Ireland would be reversed, and the work to build a better future for all made more difficult.

The character of Irish farming has not been understood by the British Government. Our farmers stand to gain much more within Europe than outside.



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

## International Affairs

The SDLP were instrumental in keeping the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on the agenda.

The SDLP was instrumental in the campaign to implement a tougher regime on controlled foreign companies to restrict tax abuse by large corporations in the developing world.

The SDLP has voted against the replacement of the UK's nuclear weapons system and in favour of redirecting the money spent on this into health, education and welfare.

The SDLP has consistently supported those working for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We are proud to be the first Irish party to vote in favour of recognising an independent and viable Palestinian state.

The SDLP has voted against reckless British military interventions in Libya and Syria.

We will continue to lead the way in protecting our local economy and the peace process by doing all we can to keep the North within the European Union.

“*The SDLP was instrumental in the campaign to implement a tougher regime on controlled foreign companies to restrict tax abuse by large corporations in the developing world.*”



Uniting People  
**BUILDING PROSPERITY**







Published by:

**SDLP Headquarters, 121 Ormeau Road  
Belfast BT7 1SH**

For further information:

**Tel: 02890 247700**

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

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

Printed by:

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

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