

Counting the cost of Direct Rule . . .

Riall Díreach - an costas a chomhaireamh...

and putting it right
agus é a cheartú

November 2005



Counting the Cost of Direct Rule . . . And Putting it Right

It has been over three years since the British Government suspended the Assembly and the Executive on October 14th 2002.

In that time, British Direct Rule has undermined the Programme for Government and the priorities agreed by members of the last Executive and Assembly. Driven not by a commitment to serve the people of the north, but by a Whitehall imperative to slash public spending, British Direct Rule Ministers have refused to adequately finance badly needed services, programmes and reforms that were identified as essential to make social and economic progress. While Direct Rule persists, this will not change.

Direct rule is not just undemocratic. It's not just bad for the Peace Process. Direct Rule has proven bad for our economy and bad for our society. It has made it impossible to manage the economy in the interests of all. It has impeded the delivery of essential services to all on an equal basis. It has stalled the process of reform in healthcare and education. It has inflicted damage on the agricultural sector. It has therefore imposed unacceptable economic costs and social costs.

It's high time to count the costs of Direct Rule, and to set about putting it right.

Direct Rule: Counting the Costs

Direct Rule Ministers have not operated in the interests of the people of the north.

In some cases this is partly attributable to Ministerial disengagement or incompetence. For example, Direct Rule Ministers recently overlooked the fact that we were about to lose EU Peace funding. But such indifference and incompetence

only compound the central problem, which is structurally inherent to Direct Rule - that is unaccountability. We have no way of removing those from power who either cannot perform or who follow an agenda detrimental to the interests of our people.

The main problem with Direct Rule Ministers is that they are interim appointees with no mandate and accountable to nobody in the north. Their ability to deliver has no impact on their political futures. Further, their decisions are circumscribed by a broader agenda and policy imperatives that have nothing to do with the people of the north. They have flatly refused to listen to either the genuine concerns raised by democratically mandated politicians or the local expertise of community and voluntary organisations.

Direct Rule decisions have had broad negative consequences for us all.

Thirty years plus of British under-investment has meant that major economic and social infrastructural deficits impeding our development remain unaddressed. Spending cuts in the most recent Direct Rule Budget will further devastate services across a range of areas.

So there are specific costs of Direct Rule that can be counted, which impact on the economy, agriculture, healthcare and education, some of which are detailed in this document.

The fact that the British Government is now determined to force us down the road to privatisation of services and greater dependency on PFI and PPP makes ending Direct Rule a matter of urgency. If PPP/PFI contracts are signed under Direct Rule, this will bind any future Assembly and Executive into a policy straitjacket and severely restrict its freedom of action for decades to come. Direct Rule is therefore a liability to all of our society - nationalists and unionists alike.

...And Putting It Right

Since the Good Friday Agreement was signed more than seven years ago the institutions have functioned properly for less than 18 months. This dysfunction and the more recent lengthy suspension have denied us all an adequate opportunity to work together to reverse three decades of British Direct Rule and unionist misrule.

We urgently need to get the institutions back up and running so we can start to undo the damage now. Any further delay will only compound our problems with continued under-investment, mis-investment and under-funding of services. This will mean further damage to our economy, our education and healthcare systems and our rural communities. It will mean that the fight against poverty, disadvantage and inequality will slide even further down the policy agenda.

The IRA decision to end its armed campaign and complete the process of putting arms beyond use has opened up a new opportunity to get the institutions back up and running. Failure to make the most of this opportunity benefits no one, as this will consign us all to more bad decisions under Direct Rule.

This is a challenge for us all. Unionists have walked away from every initiative aimed at restoring the institutions. Their refusal to engage and agree a way forward has penalised everyone, not just republicans. The question is - how long will the DUP allow Direct Rule Ministers to take decisions to the detriment of people in the north?

The political institutions must be restored. The British Government must deliver a Peace Dividend that can be invested by locally accountable government for the common good. And we must all work together collectively to plan our new society.

Sinn Féin is up to the challenge.

I. Direct Rule and Economic Management

Economic Cost of Direct Rule No. 1 – An Inefficient, Ineffective and Unequal Economy

Several centuries of British rule followed by decades of unionist misrule created an inefficient, ineffective and unequal economy. This has been consolidated under contemporary British Direct Rule by Ministerial failure to redress structural weaknesses and wrong policy choices.

Headlines about growing prosperity and employment disguise the reality that more than half a million people in the north of Ireland are still 'economically inactive'. Just under half are on long-term sickness or incapacity benefit (the bulk of the remainder are pensioners and students).

Under Direct Rule between 2002-2004 the north lost proportionately more manufacturing jobs than any area of Britain or Ireland. The only growth in jobs has been in the part-time, low wage female service sector. While the creation of such jobs boosts employment statistics it has no real effect on reducing or eliminating poverty.

Direct Rule Ministers are not motivated to engage in the profound structural reform and investment necessary to reverse this situation and truly revitalise the economy. Instead, they are satisfied if they can cut spending to the greatest extent possible without causing economic and social collapse under their watch.

These, therefore, are the ongoing economic costs of Direct Rule.

Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.1: Persistent Structural Weakness in the Economy

The structural economic problems in the north are by now familiar. They include:

- The loss of the manufacturing base, and consequent poor productivity
- A lack of focus on R&D, training and skills
- Over-dependence on the public sector and service industries
- Poor infrastructure
- Imbalanced regional development

The result is an inefficient, ineffective and unequal economy characterised by high levels of economic inactivity, poverty and inequality.

In their 'Economic Vision' document last year, even the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) recognised that the main obstacle facing the economy in the north of Ireland is the lack of economic sovereignty - that fiscal policy, taxes and public expenditure, along with the regulatory frameworks, are set in Whitehall not in Belfast. In other words, Direct Rule is the problem.

Another impediment is partition itself. It has made the economy less viable.

A small island with a population of just over 5 million people cannot develop successful economic strategies on the basis of economic division. The smaller northern economy within that is unsustainable by itself and cannot exist in isolation.

The devastating economic consequences of partition are most obvious in the border counties, but the impact is broader in that the north as a whole has been excluded from the economic advances of the 26 Counties.

Partition also means automatically forfeiting economies of scale available from island-wide initiatives. For example, indisputably the most efficient response to the infrastructure deficit common to both jurisdictions is to establish all-island Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), energy and transport networks that include the North West.

Thus, competition between north and south and neglect of all-Ireland economic opportunities is wasting money every day.

We know the two macro-structural problems in our economy are lack of sovereignty and partition. No British Government review can really ensure efficiency, avoid duplication and make the most of finite resources while partition and Direct Rule remain in place.

The only way to truly transform the economy in the north of Ireland is to set it in the context of an island-wide strategy for development and regeneration. To succeed, any economic development strategy must at a minimum remove the barriers to north/south business development and trade and to cross-border working mobility.

Putting it Right: It is only by adopting a unified approach to the development of an all-Ireland economic strategy that our economy and the country as a whole will achieve its full potential. As an immediate interim measure we need to end Direct Rule, restore the Assembly and devise an agreed remedial package in the common interest, with a strong all-Ireland dimension.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Prioritise further development and expansion of the existing All-Ireland Implementation Bodies and Areas of Co-operation such as Intertradelreland.*
- *Push for the amalgamation of investment*

agencies such as Invest NI and IDA Ireland. In the short term, rather than being competitors, they should work together on harmonising investment regimes and sectoral development strategies, and towards a fair geographical share-out of inward investment.

- Increase investment in partnerships to deliver the skills required to increase small businesses, meet the skill requirements of small businesses while also increasing investment in new indigenous and existing small business support. (Currently 60% of INI's budget is in direct foreign investment which is a tried, tested and failed strategy e.g. Europa Tool, CC Technologies etc.

Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.2: Persistent Poverty and Inequality

In the north half a million people live in poor households. One hundred and fifty thousand children live in poverty, as do 50% of disabled people's households.

Persistent and deep-rooted poverty exists in both unionist and nationalist areas and in both rural and urban areas. Sinn Féin recognises this, and wants it to end.

Seven years on from the Good Friday Agreement, instead of measurable progress achieved across the range of social, economic and cultural disparities that prevail, inequalities are actually deepening. This is because the equality and human rights components of the Good Friday Agreement that should help remediate the cross-community problem of poverty have been deliberately blocked, undermined and minimised.

Under Direct Rule the British Government has failed to give the appropriate political, economic and legislative leadership and has largely abdicated responsibility for decision-making on key

policy areas to bureaucrats and civil servants who have acted as gatekeepers against change.

Political parties who have not worked together to put them under pressure to ensure that tackling poverty is a priority have let direct Rule Ministers off the hook. There is huge unrealised potential in bringing our political forces together such as under the West Belfast and Shankill Economic Taskforce. But such successes have only been possible when the Assembly was functioning.

This failure of political leadership has given the green light to those within unionism historically opposed to equality in the north, who have consistently denied their role in fostering and maintaining the conditions in which inequality thrives. Direct Rule has therefore minimised the impact of the Equality Agenda.

As a consequence, the most recent statistics from OFMDFM Indicators of Social Need for NI (September 2004) show that on every social indicator nationalists continue to be worst affected. However, the levels of comparable and consistent disadvantage in some unionist areas are equally unacceptable and have also not significantly changed under Direct Rule.

Putting it Right: Everyone without exception deserves to be lifted out of the poverty trap. We need to tackle disadvantage everywhere it exists. This requires the restoration of the Assembly, cooperation on anti-poverty strategies and prioritisation of public spending on the basis of objective need alone. Any other approach, particularly one based on religious or sectarian criteria, will only compound inequality.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- Ensure public spending is prioritised on the basis of objective and fulfills Section 75 requirements.*

- *Push for an anti-poverty strategy that tackles unemployment, low pay, the under-provision of childcare, and educational and health inequalities suffered by all deprived and marginalised communities.*
- *Fast-track development of a comprehensive plan to eliminate the historic gap between rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant, West and East of the Bann including strategies to eliminate inequalities in housing, infrastructure investment, and community development.*
- *Harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to create a society based on the full expression of equality and human rights for all and the prospect of a different social, political and economic landscape emerging out of decades of sectarianism, discrimination and division.*

Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.3: Persistent Investment Disparities

The Invest NI (INI) report published in July 2005 shows that Direct Rule Ministers have presided over a continuing imbalance in the targeting of investment resources to the detriment of the areas of highest deprivation and unemployment.

INI claim that more than 80% of investment is located in Targeting Social Need (TSN) areas. The figures show that this is clearly not the case.

For example, despite high deprivation and unemployment and demonstrably great need, West Belfast received fewer offers of financial assistance than any other constituency. North and West Belfast together received less than a third of the financial assistance given to South and East Belfast for 2003-04 (£12.6 million compared to £41.5 million).

West of the Bann has received only 10% of

assistance given and is due to receive only 10% of planned investment.

Investment is also not being directed to border areas despite well-documented evidence that these are severely disadvantaged.

For example, the five border constituencies (South Down, Newry and Armagh, Foyle, West Tyrone, and Fermanagh and South Tyrone) together have received, and will receive, less planned assistance than South Belfast alone. South Belfast is set to receive nearly one third of all INI planned investment in the current financial cycle.

Overall Belfast gets the lion's share of INI support, having received over 45% of all assistance in 2003-04, and set to get an even greater share of all planned investment. In comparison all seven border councils (Armagh, Omagh, Newry and Mourne, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Strabane and Derry) will receive just over 20% of planned investment. The seven councils West of the Bann received £20 million less than Belfast in 2003-04 and the planned investment is £92 million less.

In fact a council-by-council analysis of the distribution of investment by INI shows that the six most income and employment-deprived council areas (Strabane, Derry, Omagh, Moyle, Cookstown and Newry and Mourne) received less financial assistance and will receive less planned investment than the wealthy parliamentary constituency of South Belfast. Moyle Council is at the bottom of the table for number of offers, actual assistance and planned investment. These six most deprived council areas received only £5,752 financial assistance per person within their council area compared to almost five times as much (£27,054) per person in South Belfast.

The correlation between those areas that are losing out on Invest NI support - West of the Bann,

the border counties, North and West Belfast - with the mapping of areas that are the most deprived and have the least jobs is highly significant.

Under Direct Rule Invest NI are clearly failing in their duty to not only equality-proof their investment strategy but are failing to ensure tangible equality outcomes. By replicating patterns of neglect, under-investment, disadvantage and discrimination, Invest NI has become part of the problem. They have no commitment to seriously tackling economic and social need. Direct Rule Ministers have shown no interest in challenging or changing this.

Putting it Right: Equitable economic development in the Six Counties requires the elimination of this entrenched disparity in investment. This will only happen if the Assembly is restored, and objective need is made the primary basis for investment.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Ensure that both INI and DETI are made accountable for these failures.*
- *Set targets and timetables to urgently redress investment imbalances.*

Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.4: Ill-Advised Budgetary Cuts

It would be impossible to catalogue here all the ill-advised budget cuts made by Direct Rule Ministers. Nor does this short document allow for a fully detailed statement of the cumulative impact of British budgeting that has created the economic mess that a restored Assembly would have to try to rectify.

The recent decision to cut funding to the Start a Business Programme (SaBP), a core Invest NI programme, provides but one illustrative example of the disconnect between social value and spending decisions under Direct Rule.

We all know that outside the Belfast region the bulk of new business growth and new jobs will be from local small businesses. In this regard, SaBP has proven to be a successful programme creating additional jobs and wealth, consistent with DETI's Economic Vision, which identifies enterprise as one of the four drivers of the economy.

Nevertheless, this year the budget for SaBP was cut almost in half, from £6.7m per annum to £3.5m. Notwithstanding the fact that this cut was due to a loss of money from Europe via local councils, Direct Rule Ministers failed to prepare for this loss and failed to make up the shortfall. The impact of this will be the loss of between 900 and 1500 potential jobs and a loss of turnover to the economy of between £12 and £19 million. Without a functioning Assembly there was no one to step in and ensure that this budget remained a priority and protected it from unwarranted cuts.

Putting it Right: We need to restore the Assembly in order to rid ourselves of such patently poor budgetary decision-making under Direct Rule. However there is also an onus on the British Government to deliver on the Peace Dividend to tackle these problems.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Equality-proof, human rights-proof and poverty-proof all budgets;*
- *Ensure that small, locally-owned businesses remain a policy and budgetary priority.*
- *Push for delivery of a Peace Dividend with an economic development package from Britain that includes:*
 - *Public expenditure commitments*
 - *Job creation strategies that create higher value jobs.*
 - *Support for indigenous industry*
 - *Balanced regional economic and infrastructure development.*
 - *Investment in R&D, training and skills.*

- *Effective implementation of the statutory equality duty.*

Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.5: Persistent Infrastructure Deficit

Investors will go where the infrastructure is and avoid the areas where it is absent. As a consequence of a persistent lack of infrastructure and consequent investment, the most deprived region in the north is West of the Bann, particularly in relation to unemployment and income levels, as confirmed most recently in the PWC Annual Report 2005 and Multiple Deprivation Measures (NISRA, May 2005). Direct Rule Ministers have done little or nothing to change this.

Their ongoing neglect of the transport infrastructure in Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh is just one example. The lack of motivation to change this under Direct Rule was illustrated by the statement of a senior civil servant at a seminar in Derry in October 2004, that the Belfast - Derry route may get a dual carriageway by 2025, but even then it would only go as far as Dungiven.

The practical out-working of this ongoing neglect of the infrastructure deficit under Direct Rule is that while the overall manufacturing loss in the north is 6%, in Derry it is 34% - more than five times greater.

Without strategically managed infrastructural development, the northwest will continue to face higher unemployment and lower levels of income. A long term, sustainable capital investment programme with an All-Ireland dimension is required to deliver balanced regional development.

Rather than doing this, however, Direct Rule Ministers are pushing through a privatisation agenda that will lock in 25-30 year infrastructural

development contracts, despite the cross-jurisdictional evidence showing that Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) or Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) are not always the most efficient or cost effective.

The evidence:

- June 2005 - after spending £14m on lawyers, consultants, architects and miscellaneous sundries, the NHS ditched plans for the Paddington health campus in west London, because projected costs rose from £360m to £1.1 billion, and the number of beds fell from 1000 to 800. This wasn't the case with a PFI scheme at Walsgrave hospital where the number of beds fell by 20%, while costs rose by 1100%.
- June 17th 2005 - Scottish ministers decided it was cheaper to spend £25m buying out the private financiers who built the Inverness airport terminal than to let them carry on. In six years, corporations made £8.5m on an investment of £5.5m.
- The Skye Bridge was bought back by the Scottish Executive in 2004 for £27m. Total cost to the public was £93.6m for a bridge that should have cost £15m.
- June 9th 2005 - a senior civil servant in the British Department of Health revealed that PFI deals were locking the NHS into 30-year contracts for services that might become useless in five.

Without a functioning Assembly, there is no way to effectively challenge the PPP/PFI dogma, or to even demand an accurate comparative costing on a project-by-project basis.

Putting it Right: We need to restore the Assembly in order to regain control over the future of infrastructure development and to ensure that the people in the Six Counties really do the get best deal and real value for money.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Work for balanced regional development and set targets and timetables to urgently redress infrastructural imbalances.*
- *Establish a PPP-PFI watchdog body to monitor existing contracts.*
- *Ensure that all options are examined for public funding of future projects to guarantee value for money and that the best interests of the people in the Six Counties are being served.*

Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.6: Increasing Energy Costs

It is well established that the privatisation deal (and particularly the fixed long-term generation contracts) brokered by Direct Rule Ministers in the 1990s has been a disaster in the north. The previous Regulator, Douglas McIlldoon, revealed that by the end of the decade electricity privatisation will have taken an additional £1 billion out of the local economy.

The Direct Rule energy deal has been bad for the individual domestic customer and bad for the economy.

Putting it Right: The Assembly must be restored to address this as a matter of urgency, and should pressure the British Government to accept responsibility for this bad deal. It should demand that the British Government come forward with a plan to create a level playing field for our businesses, significantly bring down electricity prices and eradicate fuel poverty.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Work to eradicate fuel poverty, which contributes to over 1,300 early deaths of older people every year from cold-related illnesses.*
- *Lead the debate around the need for a British Government intervention to buy-out the*

remaining life of the generation contracts and to allow, for example, new entrants into the energy market such as ESB to set a lower and more competitive price given the commitment to create a single all-Ireland energy market.

- *Ensure that private companies in the energy sector do not make super-profits while people struggle to pay energy bills.*
- *Hold these companies to account and ensure that they act in a transparent manner, adhering to the regulatory framework.*

Economic Cost of Direct Rule No. 2: A Rural Crisis

Direct Rule Ministers have presided over a rural crisis. Farming and fishing incomes are falling and poverty levels are increasing in rural communities.

Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.1: A Spiralling Crisis in Agriculture

Direct Rule agriculture policy and the separate development of the northern agriculture sector as a result of partition have worked against northern farmers.

Agriculture has a very important part to play in the North's economy, 80,000 jobs are dependent upon its existence.

In the north the continued link to British farming policy has been detrimental not beneficial - from the impact of the Beef export ban to the delays in making the Single Farm Payments. Direct Rule is responsible for a spiralling crisis in agriculture.

Direct Rule has undermined progress in key areas including the animal health strategy. For example, at a time when UK produce is viewed throughout

the world with suspicion, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) have followed an outdated, restrictive and harmful UK policy agenda instead of adopting an all Ireland approach to selling Irish food. Instead they have insisted in labelling food products and beef as UK.

Despite the north's clean bill of health for many years, our have farmers suffered massive losses running into tens of millions of pounds as a result of the beef exports ban. Millions more were lost in destroying animals over thirty months as required under British agricultural policy, while many other European States tested animals over this age to allow safe animals into the food chain. The South also took similar steps to test animals over thirty months to allow them enter the food chain several years ago. Yet the North's administration has stubbornly refused to seek the regionalisation of the North's beef industry to be allowed to test these animals.

Meanwhile there has been no progress on removing UK status from animals in the north of Ireland. This has compelled the agricultural industry to take whatever price UK supermarkets feel like giving them, costing farmers many millions of pounds. The average beef farm lost in excess of £5,000 last year, yet Direct Rule Ministers failed to act.

Farmers are now caught in a nightmare scenario of falling prices and increasing costs. At the same time as our beef farmers are losing up to £150 per head , they are also facing huge bills with land rental, contractors and fertiliser payments due in the same period. Banks have stopped extending bank overdrafts and started refusing cheques. Meanwhile the Single Farm Payment for this year (2005) will probably not be paid until early 2006, and DARD will not be able to pay our farmers until the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has the English, Scottish and Welsh farmers sorted out. Again due to the fact that the North is tied to UK policy, and

the EU make payments to the UK, we are unable to move forward until the other UK regions have calculated their payment entitlements.

The impediments that currently hamper the development of a proper policy need to be removed to allow farmers to sell a world-class product for maximum return. They also need greater ownership and control of an organisation that will be the advocate for marketing our red meat industry.

Given the loss in farm incomes over many years of Direct Rule, the hundreds of thousands of pounds wasted and mismanaged by DARD have had a severe overall impact on rural communities and their economies.

If these disadvantages weren't enough, Direct Rule has also stifled an all-Ireland approach to agriculture. In particular, DARD has ignored the massive potential all-Ireland marketing would bring to the northern producers, who could benefit from capitalising on a 'clean green Irish' brand. In addition, promises made during the lifetime of the Assembly to create an all-Ireland animal and plant health policy, have been buried under Direct Rule.

Putting it Right: Recognising the damage that being tied to UK Agriculture policy has done to the local industry Sinn Féin are committed to the development and implementation of all-Ireland policies and also a more responsive approach to the needs of the farming community.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Push ahead with the development and implementation of an all-Ireland animal health strategy.*
- *Encourage the development of a clean green brand for all Irish produce.*
- *Examine the relationship between farmgate and supermarket prices.*

- *Campaign for an end to the Beef Ban.*
- *Support measures to stabilise farmgate prices.*

Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.2: No Coherent Plan for Rural Regeneration

The approach of Direct Rule, Direct Rule Ministers' to rural development in the north has been piecemeal, with badly designed programmes that proved worthless to the objective of improving incomes.

Direct Rule Ministers have shown no real interest in providing alternative employment in rural areas. If it were not for innovative European Initiatives, far greater poverty would exist in our rural communities.

Direct Rule Ministers' poor planning, under-funding and delay in approving projects has also undermined the delivery of the Rural Tourism Initiative. This will further add to the poor economic outlook for rural communities.

Direct rule has led to a hand's off approach in monitoring the progress of how rural communities are accessing rural regeneration programmes. Local Delivery structures are without doubt the best way of regenerating local communities. Currently the LEADER + programme is the only rural programme which DARD is responsible for that is a success.

This is due in no small way to the massive commitment of local people in their own areas having a say in how programmes are shaped and delivered. Voluntary directors are at the forefront of creating hundreds of jobs in their own areas and responsible for safeguarding many more.

Using the LEADER model of delivery Sinn Féin will seek to consolidate local delivery into one body within the new RPA structures, and bring all

government departments together at a regional level so proper resources can be brought to bear to tackle poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.

Direct Rule Ministers have not got the interest or commitment to engage in this process, or to challenge their own civil service about their current policy which has excluded many hundreds of people from accessing the assistance for which they are entitled to.

Putting it Right: The development of effective local delivery mechanisms for a new Rural Development programme with a strong role of rural communities is a priority.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Prioritise the rollout of a new Rural Development Programme.*
- *Support the development of strong and effective Local Delivery Structures.*
- *Support and develop policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.*

II. Direct Rule and Provision of Essential Services

Direct Rule has had a negative impact on the provision of essential services in two ways. First, the Whitehall regime's spending cuts have been imposed without regard to our needs. Second, Direct Rule Ministers have not delivered on - and are not prepared to deliver - the needed structural reforms that will make these services work better in the interests of all.

While the negative consequences are in no way limited to the healthcare and education systems, the impacts on these two critical services provide an example of the kind of problems ongoing Direct Rule prevents us from solving together.

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 1 – Strangulation of the Healthcare Service through Under-funding and Inaction

The health service is in need of a massive injection of funds, which Direct Rule Ministers presently refuse to release.

Many agree that at least £400m-£500 million of additional investment is needed on an annual basis over the next number of years. This investment should come directly through the promised Peace Dividend, and not through Public-Private Partnerships, which will only result in future service cutbacks to meet loan repayments and will limit future service development.

The healthcare service is also in need of major structural reform.

Without the oversight of a functioning Assembly there is no prospect of change, only the prospect of the present situation getting worse.

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.1: Stalled Reform of Healthcare Structures

The reform of healthcare structures in the north is essential and long overdue.

Sinn Féin reject bureaucratic change under the guise of efficiency in favour of a true commitment to create real change in service provision based upon value for money, quality assurance and increased accessibility;

There is a need for the establishment of a Single Employing Authority within the health service, the biggest employer in the Six Counties, to ensure parity in terms and conditions across the north for

all professional and non-professional staff. There should also be progress in democratising the health service to involve representation from staff organisations, public representatives and user groups in policy, planning and decision-making.

Sinn Féin proposals to end to the confusing layers of health bureaucracy by scrapping the four separate Health Boards and establishing a single strategic body to co-ordinate services ground to a halt under Direct Rule.

Again, since that time nothing significant has been done.

The effectiveness of future healthcare structures should not also be confined by the border but should be configured to reflect the needs of communities across the island.

Putting it Right: The lack of equality of access to healthcare services is the biggest concern for people throughout Ireland. Removing artificial barriers to access and the employment of staff must be a priority in delivering change.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will seek:

- *Development of a cross-border network of hospital services.*
- *Greater co-ordination in the provision of primary care services.*
- *Setting up a Regional Authority under the joint control of Health Departments north and south.*
- *Expansion of the cross-border Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) model.*
- *Reform of accreditation procedures to allow for the free movement of staff throughout the island.*
- *Establishment of joint training strategies for healthcare workers.*
- *Harmonisation of child protection policies and the creation and effective monitoring of a*

common sex-offenders register.

- *Establishment of cross-border initiatives in relation to drugs awareness.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.2: The Rise of Waiting Lists

In March 05, there were 49,250 patients still waiting for hospital treatment. In addition, over 160,000 people are waiting for an appointment to see a consultant and this figure reflects a rise of 11.6% over the past year. Yet, the inpatient waiting list could have been reduced to a figure of over 130,000 if these patients had seen a consultant and even half of them had been referred for inpatient treatment.

In July of this year, it was revealed that some 36% of available weekday hospital theatre capacity was not being used. It was estimated that, at least, an additional £50 million, both in terms of personnel and equipment, would need to be invested to bring that figure up to 100% usage of existing hospital theatre capacity.

The inability to recruit and retain specialist medical and nursing staff across all health Trusts is a major contributory factor to the rise in hospital waiting lists, and is also creating unnecessary stress and additional burdens on existing staff. We need action now, but none is being taken by Direct Rule Ministers.

Putting it Right: The recruitment and retention of frontline staff across all healthcare professions must be a priority. Sinn Féin will continue with our healthcare reforms and take action against ALL waiting lists as a priority,

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Work for an immediate and significant increase in resources for the health service.*
- *Support development of a predictive recruitment strategy to fill the current*

vacancy levels for hospital consultants, anaesthetists and specialist nurses.

- *Increase the numbers of entrants to medical schools, nursing and post graduation specialist training programmes.*
- *Tackle the disgraceful waiting lists for community services by recruiting increased numbers of Occupational Therapists, Speech therapists and Physiotherapists.*
- *Work for the release of immediate funding to end waiting lists for the dispensing of medicines to persons with life disabling diseases such as MS.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.3: A Growing Crisis in Mental Health

Evidence from service users, carers and service providers point to significant gaps in service provision for people with mental health needs. Current information, including that presented by the Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, shows persistent and significant under-investment by the British government in our mental health services. For whatever reason, Direct Rule Ministers allocated less funding to our mental health service on a pro-rata population basis compared with mental health services in England, Scotland and Wales. On a comparative pro-rata basis, they short-changed our mental health services by at least £50 million between 1999 and 2006.

One of the results of this Direct Rule under-funding of mental health provision has been high levels of pre-mature and avoidable deaths. More people have died in the Six Counties as a result of suicides since 1969 than died as a result of the political conflict.

Putting it Right: It is essential that there is a renewed focus on mental healthcare reform and an equal allocation of resources to deliver reform.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Work together with the community and voluntary sectors, health professionals and others to establish an All-Ireland Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy.*
- *Streamline the mechanism for delivering accountable funding to the professional sector and to community and voluntary organisations to initiate quality assured community-based health projects to deal directly with suicide and self-harm.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 1.4: Failure to Invest in Children

The recent creation of a Minister for Children's post is welcome and vindicates Sinn Féin's position that there should be a Minister with specific responsibility for Children and Young People.

However, Direct Rule Ministers have presided over unacceptable increases in child poverty levels, and have not been willing to use their power of budgetary allocation to make the necessary changes.

This new Minister must have adequate powers and resources, and children and children's services need mainstream funding denied them by Direct Rule Ministers to build upon the Sure Start initiatives introduced by Sinn Féin Health Minister Bairbre de Brún.

Putting it Right: Mainstreaming of Sure Start and adequate powers and resources for the new Minister for Children must be part a broader prioritisation of the need of children and young people.

In a restored Assembly Sinn Féin will:

- *Insist that the new Minister for Children has adequate powers and resources to ensure that the rights of children and young people are*

protected and promoted and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is speedily implemented.

- *Pursue additional funding adequate to mainstream Sure Start into all TSN areas.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2 – Stunting of the Education System and Stalling of Reforms

The damage caused by Direct Rule is particularly evident in the historic under-funding of our education system compared to huge investment in the education systems of England and Wales.

Successive Direct Rule Ministers have increased the cost of further and higher education in the north while also imposing budget restrictions that have eroded the foundations of our education system in early years provision through key stage 1 to post-16 entitlement, and cut school transport and classroom assistant support for special needs children

The damage caused by under-funding and cuts has now been compounded by Direct Rule Ministerial moves to privatise educational entitlement in further and higher education as well as school services.

Not only have Direct Rule Ministers under-funded our education system, they have also stalled the reform programme introduced by Sinn Féin Education Minister Martin McGuinness.

Only a restored Assembly can address our educational needs with the urgency they deserve.

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.1: Failure to Address Educational Underachievement

Direct Rule under-funding has meant that no

adequate action has been taken to address the fact that 50% of all male pupils and 33% of all female pupils do not achieve 5 GCSEs at A* to C, and last year more than 1250 pupils left school without any GCSEs. A quarter of all school leavers have poor numeracy and literacy skills.

This catastrophe has been compounded by an appalling delivery of skills to meet the needs of young people, the business sector and the economy and a complete failure to invest in preparation for new post primary transfer arrangements endangering the development of a comprehensive post primary education system.

Putting it Right: Early and targeted intervention is the key to addressing educational under achievement.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Promote early intervention programmes and innovative literacy and numeracy learning schemes, complemented by extended school programmes, in order to address the current skills deficit.*
- *Promote a skills strategy that recognises the starting point of students while working in partnership with business and industry to ensure the delivery of apprenticeship training.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.2: Failure to Address Special Educational Need

As a result of Direct Rule decisions there are 12,606 children with statements of educational need whose needs are still not being met. Another 50,548 are on stages 1-5 of the process. For example in one primary school (Good Shepard PS) amalgamation of two classes has resulted in a class of 30 children, 18 with special needs, yet only half have been statemented and half await completion.

Putting it Right: The strategic delivery of services, including the Centre of Excellence at Middletown, and investment in early years parenting centres can make a real difference in addressing Special Educational Need.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Use the Assembly to champion the new Special Educational Needs Order (SENDO) to ensure that resources are available to meet Statements of Need for medical and emotional behavioural support.*
- *Ensure that special needs transport facilities are available to complement the SENDO while expediting the Centre of Excellence at Middletown initiated by Education Minister Martin McGuinness for the strategic delivery special needs services across the whole island of Ireland.*
- *Invest in early years parenting centres that offer the best opportunity to expedite the identification of special needs while reviewing the current Statementing process.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.3: Failure to Invest to Offset the Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes

Two out of five northern children live in households below 30% of the average income. Yet despite the high level of need for additional educational supports for such children, Direct Rule Ministers cut 62 teaching and education support jobs in one such high-need constituency alone, West Belfast.

Putting it Right: Poverty is one of the greatest issues that British Direct Rule has failed to tackle. Child Poverty must be addressed through early intervention and the targeting of resources to those most in need. The loss of both teaching and support staff, particularly from schools operating in areas of multiple deprivation, only further undermines support for those most at risk from poverty.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Make early years provision universally available with enough resources to ensure early effective detection of special educational and other family support needs.*
- *Accelerate the mainstreaming of Sure Start and parenting centres providing early years provision with a more focused delivery of health and social service care.*
- *Ensure quality assured nutritious free school meals for all children.*
- *Expand school breakfast programmes.*
- *Expand after-school projects and homework clubs.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.4: Persistence of Social Segregation in Education

Academic selection is a system of social segregation that fails too many of our children, particularly those from deprived rural and urban areas. However, under Direct Rule the reforms proposed by Sinn Féin Education Minister Martin McGuinness have stalled.

Putting it Right: Academic selection has meant that children, particularly from some of our most disadvantaged backgrounds, such as the Shankill, have been deemed a failure at age 11. This is wrong.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Promote and invest in the development of comprehensive schools working in partnership with their feeder early years and primary schools, FE Colleges, 3rd Level and other learning facilities, to ensure the integrity of entitlement and the development of a skills and non-craft skills base to support the local economy.*
- *Support comprehensive schools that can deliver vibrant and exciting opportunities with investment that acknowledges the social and*

economic profile of the community they serve.

- *Work towards making every school a good school that celebrates all intelligences equally.*
- *Ensure effective implementation of Targeting Social Need policy.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.5: The Erosion of School Transport

The erosion of school transport in rural areas has undermined the ability of working parents to sustain employment, abolished the entitlement to free school transport while upsetting teaching curriculum. The decision to end the 2pm Bus Service is risking the health and safety of children forced to walk home along main arterial routes where there are no patrol crossings or even a pedestrian walkway. This is despite the fact that a child is hurt or killed on roads every 16 minutes and a survey carried out by Brake found that 53% of children surveyed say that the road between home and school is dangerous.

Putting it Right: The provision of school transport that is safe must be a priority.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Promote a socially inclusive school transport system, which is presently under threat due to cuts.*
- *Promote legislation for a responsive school transport system to meet the full range of need from rural to special needs children and working with colleagues in the DRD will promote an integrated public transport system.*
- *Establish standards for safe routes and safe journeys with adequate seating that includes seat belts as recommended by the last Assembly.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.6: Higher Costs of Higher Education

Top-up fees for higher education students introduced by Direct Rule Ministers can result in your son or daughter leaving university with a minimum debt of £30,000. This is an odious and unfair burden disproportionately affecting students from lower-income families, who are the very ones who could most benefit from additional support.

Putting it Right: Access to third level education should not be determined by the ability to pay.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Work to abolish Student Top-Up Fees.*
- *Use the All-Ireland Institutions to push for the harmonisation of higher educational entitlement across the country.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.9: Failure to Respect the Educational Rights of Ethnic Minorities

More than 500 pupils from ethnic communities will be denied English as an additional language education because under Direct Rule Ministers have removed 18 qualified teachers from the scheme.

Putting it Right: Children from ethnic minorities have a right to adequate and appropriate support to ensure that they benefit equally from educational opportunities.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Legislate to ensure strategic delivery of language development to minority ethnic children for whom English is a second language, including a ring-fenced budget.*

Social Cost of Direct Rule No. 2.10: No Concerted Action to Tackle Bullying in Schools

Fully 40% of primary school children and more than

a third of secondary school children have been bullied and yet Direct Rule Ministers have no action plan.

Putting it Right: The effect of Bullying on our children is immense. The failure to address the problem is an indictment on Direct Rule.

In a new Executive Sinn Féin will:

- *Develop and implement a core Anti-Bullying Strategy based upon an agreed and uniform Code of Practice underpinned by the primacy of children's rights and Child Protection.*