

# Make Change Happen



## Manifesto 2017

# Contents

Make Change Happen	2
Securing our Future In Europe	3
A Lifelong Commitment	5
Health	5
Job Creation	6
A Strong Start Fund	7
Comprehensive Childcare	7
Investing in our Future	8
Fit for purpose Social Care	9
Tackling Poverty	10
Reform and Renewal	11
Departmental Priorities	13
A Healthy Society	13
A Prosperous Economy	14
Efficient Finances	15
A Just Society	17
Supporting our Communities	20
Excellence in Education	21
Sustaining Rural Society	22
Essential Infrastructure	23

# Make Change Happen

## Déan an t-athrú a fhíorú!

This election will offer you the opportunity to make change happen.

The disgrace of the RHI 'Cash for Ash' scandal and Arlene Foster's arrogance has exposed a corruption at the center of politics. Here in Northern Ireland – at the very moment when we most needed stability and certainty – our own government has collapsed and doubt remains as to whether the institutions can be put back together again. They have left us with no budget, no Programme for Government and no delivery. Only last May they offered you a 'fresh start' – less than 10 months later that government has now failed.

If they can't work with each other, then they can't work for you and your family. They can't work for the common good. The price of their failure has cost the North far too much for far too long.

In this election you do have a choice. It is a choice between more of the same or the choice of partnership and progress. Difference doesn't have to mean division, it doesn't have to mean deadlock. The SDLP is offering you the chance to change an establishment of old bigotry and old battles. Change has come before and it is calling again now.

In this election, the SDLP is outlining a Lifelong Commitment – supporting children, young people, young workers, families and older people. When voters go to cast their ballots they can have certainty that a strong SDLP, as part of a strong alternative government, will deliver change.

This document is an extensive but not exhaustive manifesto for change. It identifies many of the areas in need of review, reform and renewal. It represents our starting point in any future negotiation on entering government.

I know that it can sometimes be hard to hope that change is possible in our politics – but change does and can come if we make it happen.

If you want to see that change, come out and vote for it.

On March 2nd – Make change happen.



Colum Eastwood  
SDLP Leader



# Securing our Future in Europe

The SDLP's 'Securing our Future in Europe' is the first paper the SDLP published and will submit as part of the extensive and varied set of European negotiations in the years ahead. It is our job and duty to set out our own vision as to how a post-Brexit Ireland will look.

The SDLP believes that the interests of all of our people are best served through securing Special Status for the North.

Special Status means: that the vote in the North last June is respected; that the political authority of devolved institutions are respected, giving them the opportunity to shape Brexit in their respective regions; that our economy, our society and our political agreements are protected.

We must not lose sight that Brexit remains the biggest threat to the economic, social and political interests of these islands. Northern Ireland is the most exposed of any part of these islands and yet our voice faces the risk of being side-lined and silenced. That is why in this election and beyond we need parties that are capable of working together and capable of overcoming difference to give voice to our common interests.

Northern Ireland needs its voice at the negotiation table and our vote needs to be respected. The period ahead will be one which will challenge all those involved. However, if the political will is there we feel that Northern Ireland should be able to secure Special Status.





# Proposals for Securing Special Status

- 

Securing Northern Ireland's membership of the European Single Market and the four freedoms it provides: free movement of people, goods, services and capital. This is in line with the proposal of the Scottish Government.
- 

Ensuring Northern Ireland's continued participation in European funding and programmes. This will entail a recasting of the North–South bodies to serve as an institutional gateway to Europe for the Northern Ireland Executive and its Departments.
- 

Measures to ensure the further development of the All–Island economy. This will build on the Common Travel Area, common membership of the Single Market and strengthened North–South bodies, particularly as regards investment and infrastructure.
- 

Securing of human rights and protections derived from European legislation.
- 

Drafting and implementation of protocols to ensure the protection of rights of cross border workers and to avoid any 'race to the bottom' as regards environmental standards and social provisions.
- 

Securing All–Island representation in the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and other European structures to ensure direct dialogue between the European institutions and Northern Ireland.



# A Lifelong Commitment

The first duty of any government is to the health and wellbeing of its citizens. The first commitment of a SDLP government will be to reshape and reimagine what can be done to support people throughout every stage of their journey.

This commitment is grounded in the challenges faced by people in their everyday lives. It outlines our support for children, young people, workers, families and older people throughout their lives.

## Health

From birth and throughout our lives, we all rely on the care and compassion provided by outstanding medical professionals in our health service. Any commitment to providing the best possible start to and support through life must begin with a pledge to look after our health and social care system.

Over the last ten years, our health service has measurably deteriorated in every area that matters to our everyday lives. GP services, A&E services, domiciliary care services, waiting times – the only thing preventing a critical system collapse in primary care has been the heroic efforts of frontline staff. They have proven limitless dedication time and again, through major incidents and chronic staff shortages. But a health service cannot survive on the generosity of its staff alone.

40,000 patients wait over a year for a first outpatient appointment.  
Three times as many patients waited more than 12 hours in A&E last year.

This is, without doubt, one of the greatest challenges facing the incoming Executive. So rather than preparing for a protracted period of negotiations, the SDLP is pledging that on day one of a new government, we will begin drafting an emergency health budget to relieve pressure on frontline staff and put patient needs first.

The failure of the last Executive to deliver a budget and the impact of the RHI 'Cash for Ash' catastrophe has stretched public finances. Resourcing health will mean difficult decisions in other areas. The SDLP is prepared to take difficult decisions to save our health service. It will be our primary focus.



## Job Creation

The Northern Ireland economy can only grow and develop if it generates more employment and focuses on securing better paid jobs. More jobs enhances society by alleviating poverty and making sure that as many people as possible have the dignity of work. More jobs will also stem the flow of our young people emigrating in pursuit of a better economic future.

This means every area of investment and expenditure must be assessed in terms of its capacity to support existing employment and generate new jobs.

However, the focus must be on the creation of the most productive employment that contributes to economic growth. Therefore there is a need for a rebalancing of employment in favour of the highest value-added sectors.

In order to compete for highly mobile, high value-added Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Northern Ireland needs to be able to offer a skilled work-force. Therefore our people, particularly young people, need to be up-skilled to be competitive in the global marketplace.

While all job investment is welcome, low paid, precarious projects do not develop high productivity sectors in our workforce. We need to raise skill levels to attract more lucrative investment in the advanced technology sectors and other professional services. Investment in these sectors creates well paid employment for software engineers, lawyers, creative design professionals as well as administrative staff.

In order to support job creation, the SDLP will ensure that the financial priorities of the next Northern Ireland Executive are targeted at those areas which have the biggest benefit for Northern Ireland's economy, including the agri-food sector and the manufacturing sector, as well as ensuring support for Small and Medium Enterprises. The SDLP will implement a dedicated Manufacturing Strategy which is long overdue.





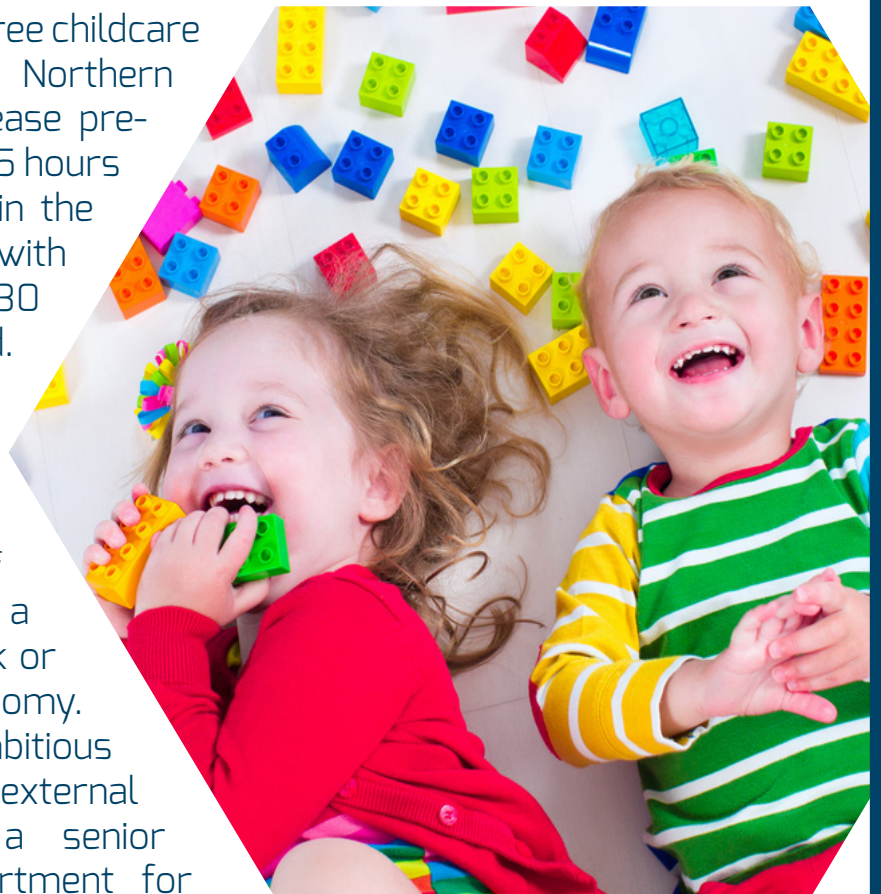
## A Strong Start Fund

There are children across Northern Ireland who live in homes with no savings or assets. For many, from the day they are born, the system is set against them and limits their potential. The SDLP's 'Strong Start Fund' will see £250 provided to every child born in Northern Ireland as a starting contribution to a junior tax free savings account. This will be topped up at age 10 with a further £250 and we will explore an option for a third top-up at age 16. At age 18, young adults take direct responsibility for their own account and can access funds. The 'Strong Start Fund' will allow parents, grandparents, family and friends to contribute. The 'Strong Start Fund' means an end to the situation where children live in households with no savings. It will also be accompanied by an increased focus in the school curriculum on savings and finance.



## Comprehensive Childcare

The SDLP believes that increasing free childcare provision is critical to families in Northern Ireland. That is why we will increase pre-school childcare provision from 12.5 hours per week to 20 hours per week in the first year of a new government, with a view to further increasing it to 30 hours when a new budget is agreed. We will also safeguard existing funding for childcare through the Childcare Strategy and ensure that this fund is fully utilised. As well as reducing the direct cost of childcare to families, this removes a key barrier for those seeking work or training, benefitting our entire economy. The SDLP will also publish an ambitious Childcare Strategy, bringing in external experts, embedded at a senior level within the Department for Communities.



# Investing in our future

It is vital that the government prioritises investment in third level education and apprenticeships. Approximately 38% of our young people travel to Britain each year to study where fees are higher and where they incur more debt. Two thirds of those who leave never return.

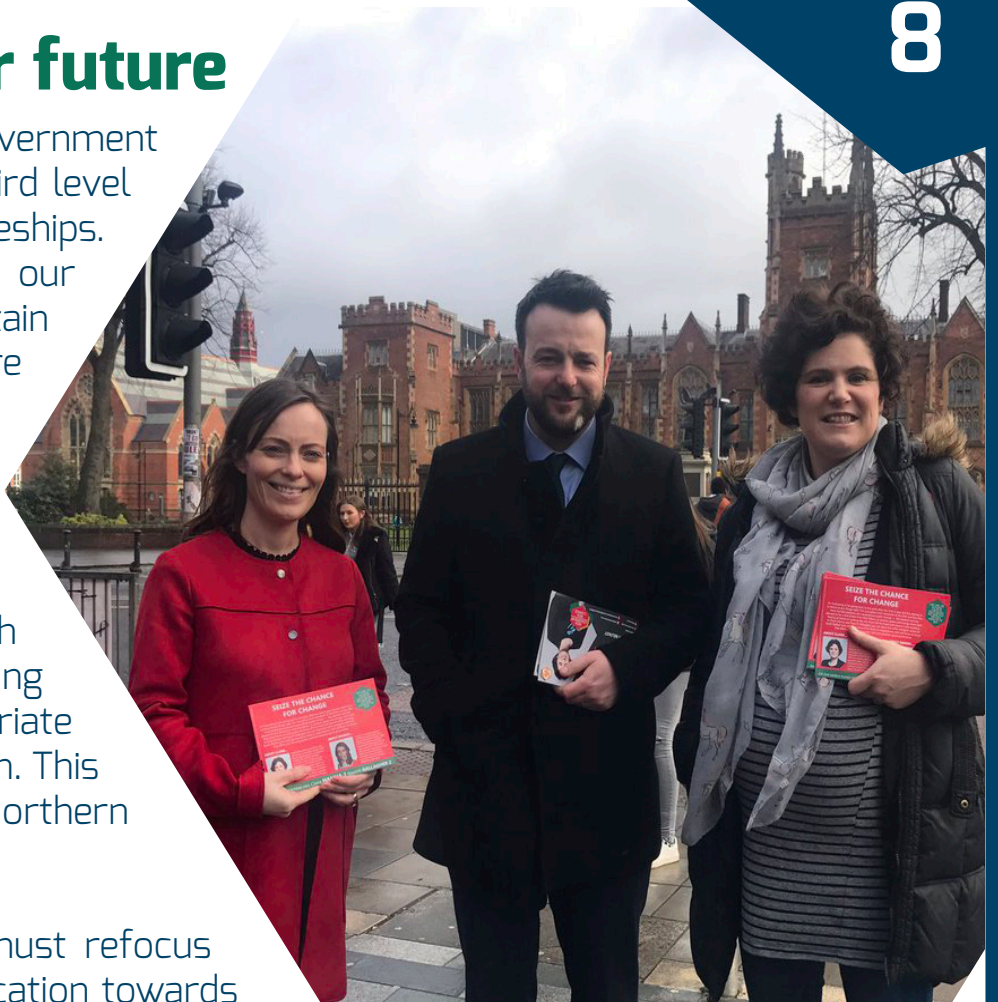
The system the North deserves is one where young people can access appropriate higher and further education. This is the surest way to grow Northern Ireland's economy.

To achieve that goal we must refocus support for third level education towards the STEM subjects and areas where graduates can add maximum immediate value to the economy. The SDLP will provide additional focused support for third-level students and refocus existing skills provision to ensure we meet the future needs of a modern fast moving economy.

The SDLP recognises that further education is not the only route available in delivering a high skill, high wage economy. The SDLP believes that the development of skills through quality apprenticeships is essential to improving the economy, stimulating work and delivering new success in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Executive has underperformed in terms of apprenticeships and skills training. The result is that we currently have a low wage, low skill economy with fewer apprenticeship places in comparison to the rest of Europe.

The SDLP believes that if we are to deliver apprenticeships we must have greater co-operation between employers and our education system. Employer led apprenticeship models can directly address gaps in skills provision and ensure positions in employment are filled. Delivering STEM related apprenticeships in Northern Ireland is essential. The SDLP believes that the current apprenticeship model must be reviewed and enhanced so apprenticeships become an attractive alternative to further education and one that delivers sustainable employment.





# Fit for purpose Social Care

Living longer is a cause for celebration, as is our vibrant and diverse older population.

An ageing population brings with it new needs, particularly in health and social care. The numbers are clear – by 2025 the number of people aged 85 and over will increase by 25,000. As a result, what is normally considered 'old age' can now last 40 or more years of peoples' lives and people will have different needs over that time.

The SDLP will oversee a reform of social care which will deliver high quality, personalised services that promote the dignity and rights of older people and place a stronger emphasis on later life health. This reform must promote independence and enable older people to exercise informed choice and control.

The failure to invest in preventative and minor intervention services, such as domiciliary care, results in an increasingly fragile and unresponsive social care system that is not meeting the needs of older people now and is not sustainable in the longer term.

There must be a clear shift towards community based services including care at home and respite services when needed. Northern Ireland is focused too much on reactive healthcare and the SDLP will aim to increase the amount of preventative social care – to change the patchwork approach and to ensure that it is human rights compliant.

Our reform will take a peer led approach to ensure the sector is adequately involved in decisions. Older people want to have confidence in the system of care and to have an adequate standard of living. Our older people should have the guarantee that if they need care, it will be of the highest quality. Most importantly, this reform must be sustainable and affordable.



# Tackling Poverty

The SDLP will work ceaselessly to tackle poverty, social exclusion and deprivation. We will pick up where the outgoing Executive failed by creating a dedicated Anti-Poverty Strategy which will also address social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need.

The rise of in-work poverty is a cause for deep concern. The SDLP is also concerned about the principle and practice of zero-hour contracts. We will work to ensure that workers are not exploited and all employees are paid a fair wage.

The issue of poverty has so many dimensions that a Poverty Commission must be created. This Commission would be based on expert advice covering areas including fuel poverty and child poverty.

The current rate of fuel poverty is 42%. The Anti-Poverty Strategy will tackle fuel poverty by establishing a Fuel Poverty Taskforce, made up of industry experts, the Department for Communities and independent members. This Taskforce will update the current fuel poverty programme to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

There are currently more than 100,000 children living in poverty in Northern Ireland. The SDLP believes that every child deserves to grow up free from the threat of poverty and with better life chances and opportunities than the generation before them.





# Reform and Renewal

Politics and government has been degraded here over the last ten years but the last ten months has seen a marked acceleration in that deterioration.

The potential of the agreement was rooted first in democratic struggle and then democratic negotiation to build a politics based on co-operation and compromise. That politics was to be judged against a number of criteria: the values of the Good Friday Agreement; an accommodation between Unionism and Nationalism in government; the development of good relations in the North, between the North and South of Ireland and between Britain and Ireland; a national reconciliation and healing the terrible past.

Each and all of these must now be renewed if parties are serious about calling a halt to the degradation in confidence and hope. Where necessary, informed and consistent with the Good Friday Agreement, there should be reform to create confidence and hope.



## The SDLP proposes:

-  Alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code should be referred to and addressed by the Assembly Commissioner for Standards ending the evident 'protect their own' culture.
-  A wider range of penalties for breaches of the Code of Conduct for MLAs.
-  The reduction of the number of Special Advisers (SpAds) in the Executive Office.
-  A Bill to regulate the conduct of SpAds, for Special Advisers to be subject to the Northern Ireland Civil Service disciplinary code and with Special Advisers salary levels to be capped, regulated and approved by an external third party.
-  The election of the First Minister and deputy First Minister jointly by the Assembly as in the Good Friday Agreement, distorted by the St Andrews Agreement.
-  The election of the Speaker by secret ballot and the abolition of the position of Principal Deputy Speaker.
-  The upgrading of the role of statutory and standing committees to 'scrutinise' departments.
-  A new generation of oversight committees on Welfare Reform and Brexit.
-  Retention of the Petition of Concern on the basis as originally intended being issues of equality and rights.
-  The introduction of a lobbying bill to regulate the lobbying of government, its ministers, the Assembly and its members including a register to make information available to the public on those communicating with relevant persons on specific policy, legislative matters or prospective decisions.
-  Publication of political donations.
-  The placing of relevant persons external to government with specialist capacity at senior levels in departments to address challenging areas and issues where legislation is required. The purpose is to secure a paradigm shift in the quality of government and capacity on diverse areas including but not limited to childcare, poverty, a shared society and human rights, equality, the European Union and business sectors.

# Departmental Priorities



*Mark H Durkan*  
*Health Spokesperson*

## A Healthy Society

### Health Service Transformation

The SDLP welcomes the publication of the report by Professor Bengoa on Health Service Transformation. We welcome many of the proposals within the report and will work with all relevant stakeholders to develop how we will take these proposals forward.

### Mental Health Provision

Mental health and preventing suicide should be priority areas at the heart of our government. As such the SDLP believes that a Junior Minister from the Executive Office should be moved to the Department of Health to work alongside the Health Minister, with specific responsibility for Mental Health. The SDLP will develop a Suicide Prevention Bill and legislation in relation to a duty of candour.

### North–South Healthcare

The SDLP is committed to an All–Island approach to health and social care, maximising resources and providing the highest level of treatment. We believe in increasing provisions for North–South healthcare including a joined-up approach to ambulance service provision in the border areas.

We remain committed to the protection and retention of full A&E and stroke services at Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry and the full A&E and cardiology services at the Downe Hospital. We understand the importance of rural health services and want to sustain all other services there and plan for the provision of new services where capacity exists.

### Community Pharmacy

The SDLP believes that there is a huge opportunity to make better use of the competencies and skills of pharmacists. The SDLP recognises that community pharmacies have a central role in delivering community based healthcare services. We will support this central role by working with pharmacies and GPs to develop a renewed community pharmacy plan to integrate and collaborate in the health service.

### Cancer Strategy

The Health Service in Northern Ireland is now the only one on these islands currently operating without a Cancer Strategy. The SDLP believes that we need a new, comprehensive Cancer Strategy that sets ambitious goals and allocates sufficient resources to ensure that cancer services can improve outcomes, meet rising demand and reduce the undeniable variation of care that exists in the North.



## IVF

The SDLP recognises the anguish facing people who have difficulties in conceiving children. The SDLP will implement the NICE recommendations which say that those eligible will be given the opportunity to receive three full cycles of IVF.

## Autism

The SDLP is committed to the proper funding of the Autism Act 2011 to ensure children with Autism and their families have the necessary support mechanisms in place.

## Abortion

The SDLP continues to oppose the extension of the 1967 Act. We have called on the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice to publish the report with the findings from the working group on Fatal Foetal Abnormality.



*Sinead Bradley*  
*Economy Spokesperson*

## A Prosperous Economy

### Increase our level of exports

The Northern Ireland economy is too small to rely on domestic demand to stimulate adequate levels of economic activity. A twin focus on attracting Foreign Direct Investment and building robust export pathways is vital. Cross-border economic co-ordination must be rapidly increased.

### Regional Economic Balance

The need for regional development in Northern Ireland is stark. Major investment in skills development and transport infrastructure is required in the North West to level the playing field with competing regions.

The SDLP will develop and implement legislation to ensure co-ordinated investment across three areas: job support and promotion from Invest NI; regional infrastructure projects; and education and training, targeted for areas and projects where it is required most urgently.

The SDLP will seek immediate negotiations with the British Treasury to implement new City Deals in the North, including the development of City Deals to address regional inequalities and disparities. Interventions should be targeted and multi-dimensional, at the level of the individual, household and region or city. Sectoral targeting will also be considered for the incubation and growth of domestic start-ups, to facilitate the growth of small and medium enterprises and to foster business clusters to increase productivity.

## **Building our Tourism sector**

Northern Ireland has managed to protect some of the most unspoilt and beautiful parts of Ireland and offers an attractive destination to both international and domestic tourists. Our tourism and hospitality sectors must be able to offer the best possible service. The SDLP will introduce a Tourism Strategy to promote, protect and enhance our tourism product. This strategy would include the extension of the Wild Atlantic Way to Ireland's North Coast.

## **Further and higher education**

The SDLP will ensure that the part-time undergraduate and postgraduate tuition fee loans are implemented. In addition to this, the SDLP will make this tuition fee loan available to those who already have an undergraduate degree if they are returning to further or higher education to reskill in a STEM subject.

## **Expansion of Magee**

The SDLP is committed to delivering the expansion of the Magee campus of Ulster University to 10,000 places. As part of this expansion, the SDLP will support the development of a Medical School in the North West to address long standing workforce issues, to enhance primary care provision West of the Bann and as a kick-start for the expansion of Magee campus of Ulster University. It makes sense economically, for our health service and for communities which for too long have seen our young, talented students forced abroad for training or work. The SDLP will explore options to fund additional university places and finance for students.

## **North-South Economic Plan**

In our 'Securing our Future in Europe' document, the SDLP proposed that the North-South bodies should be empowered to fulfil their potential. As part of this, the SDLP proposed a new agency to formulate and coordinate a single trade, investment and development strategy for the island of Ireland. The establishment of InterTrade Ireland as part of the Good Friday Agreement was in recognition that the sum of our local economies would be greater than the parts. This must be expanded upon to secure regionally just economic development.

# **Efficient Finances**

## **Further Devolution**

The devolution of Corporation Tax requires further interrogation. The international economic landscape has changed, with planned reductions in Corporation Tax in Britain, the uncertainty and disproportionate impact of Brexit, the results of the recent US Presidential election and the fragile state of Northern Ireland's economy. We will press for the devolution of further economic levers, not only the power to vary Corporation Tax, but new fiscal and borrowing powers. The SDLP are calling for the immediate establishment of a Commission to examine potential new fiscal levels, similar to the Scottish and Welsh fiscal commissions.

## Public Sector Pay and Conditions

There is considerable scope to improve the operation of the public sector by raising productivity to improve services. The end of the civil service pay freeze must mean pay recovery, particularly at low grade levels. The SDLP also believes there is a pressing need to raise pay entry bands for new entrants to the public sector. There must also be a fair and well-deserved consolidated pay-rise for our teachers, nurses, midwives and other medical staff.

## Rates Reform

The SDLP has long since advocated reform of non-domestic rates in order to combat dereliction and restore vibrancy to our high streets. We will ensure that a review of rates and their impact on job creation and business growth is completed.

## Budgetary Reform

The last Northern Ireland Executive became known as the most secretive government since devolution. The changes in monitoring rounds and failure to allow committees to analyse budgets are only two of the ways in which the outgoing Executive sought to block scrutiny. The SDLP has long since called for more transparency in government, especially surrounding budgetary processes.

The SDLP is proposing the creation of a powerful new independent mechanism to ensure the timely evaluation of fiscal risks in major Executive expenditure proposals, including economic and fiscal forecasting, evaluating performance, assessing sustainability and balance sheet analysis of public finances and scrutinising tax and welfare policy costings.

A dedicated Budget Committee and Brexit Committee are required to ensure accountability in relation to public finances and the Brexit negotiation and fallout.



*Claire Hanna*  
*Finance*  
*Spokesperson*



Embedding a clear timetable and enshrining provisions for comprehensive committee scrutiny needs to be of the utmost importance. We see a pressing need for better read across between budgets, estimates and accounts, along with supplying transparent and relevant information to explicitly show links between budget allocations and funding objectives.



*Alex Attwood*  
*Justice Spokesperson*

## A Just Society

### Addressing the Past

There is an urgent need to comprehensively and ethically address the legacy of the past and the needs of victims and survivors. This would be one of the single greatest contributions to reconciliation and healing.

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.

Over the last year, discussions on legacy have only involved the DUP, Sinn Féin, London and the Minister of Justice. This exclusive process has failed. The next phase – a decisive phase – on legacy must have an independent chair and be required to determine the character and quality of engagement which will be forthcoming to the new legacy structures. The process must fully and effectively involve victims and survivors.

### North-South

The SDLP will work to protect existing North-South arrangements and seek bold thinking and radical expansion in the range of North-South relationships. The SDLP believes that the future of North-South should revolve around principles including:

-  Respect for an outworking of the Northern Ireland's vote to Remain, including in the context of Ireland in the European Union.
-  Protection of the existing Strand Two arrangements and sectoral architecture.
-  New ambition and a paradigm shift in the scale and working of North-South.
-  New and accelerated work on the 2006 British-Irish Report on an All-Island Economy, the 2007 North-South Health Study, Irish Academy of Engineers 2010 Study on Infrastructure, 2012 Bradley Study on Cross Border Economic Renewal, 2012 Study on All-Island Procurement, the proposal for an All-Ireland Energy Authority and Independent Environment Agency.














## Institutional Abuse

The needs of victims and survivors must be front and centre in this mandate. This includes the many victims of clerical abuse. The proposals of the Hart Inquiry must be adopted and fully implemented. This includes financial redress. Action on these issues is very long overdue and must be concluded in the shortest time.

There must be urgent decisions on methods of inquiry into cases of abuse outside the institutions covered by the Hart Inquiry and into areas such as Mother and Child Homes. These decisions must be taken in a short timeframe. There must be adequate funding for victim and survivor groups in the short and longer term including proposals from victims and survivors.

## Other Rights Issues

There are multiple other rights issues that the SDLP will focus on during the upcoming mandate including:

-  Legislation to legalise marriage for same sex couples in Northern Ireland.
-  Legislation to define sectarianism informed by international standards on other forms of racism.
-  A Bill to define good relations based on the approaches in law in Scotland, Wales and England.
-  Further work to advance resolution of parading issues, first through sustained, direct, meaningful, dialogue and second the maintenance of an Independent Parades' Commission as the best model to determine parade disputes.
-  Progression of the work of the Commission on Identity and Flags based on the principles, values and requirements of the Good Friday Agreement.
-  The further expansion of proposals to develop a shared and united community given the transparent lack of ambition in Together: Building a United Community.
-  Sustained and proper baseline funding of the Victims and Survivors Service during the years of the mandate.
-  Legislation on incitement to hatred must be developed, informed by the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.
-  Rights to protect breastfeeding mothers in public places as per proposals introduced by the SDLP.



## Online Crime

The SDLP recognises that the increasing reliance on digital technologies can make us more vulnerable to those who seek to exploit this reliance for malicious purposes. The SDLP will develop a Cyber Resilience Strategy which sets out actions to stop these scams.

## Prison Reform

There is a clear need for prison reform. The SDLP will implement a reform programme and ensure that there is no go-slow or retreat. The SDLP is calling for fundamental and structural reforms to the prison service to shift the focus within prisons from security to rehabilitation whilst ensuring the safety and dignity of both prison staff and prisoners. This will extend to post release rehabilitation programmes, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and community restorative justice.

## Organised Crime

The SDLP has been consistent in our calls for a greater degree of co-operation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána to deal with crime associated with the border. Fuel laundering, smuggling and human trafficking are all areas in which inter-agency cooperation is required to successfully achieve convictions. The cost to the public purse, the damage to our shared natural environment and the devastating impact on individuals must be relentlessly pursued.

The SDLP fought hard for local oversight and robust accountability protections for the National Crime Agency. We are now calling for stronger collaboration between all relevant agencies to deliver a specific Anti-Corruption Strategy for Northern Ireland and a significant uplift in resources.

## Domestic Abuse

In 2016, there were over 78 reported domestic abuse incidents a day, with 34 each day involving at least one serious crime being committed. The SDLP is calling for a cross departmental Domestic Violence Strategy to tackle the unacceptable level of domestic abuse and gender violence in Northern Ireland as well as comprehensive legislation, including on coercive behaviour.



# Supporting our Communities

## Housing

*Access to a good quality, secure and affordable home is a fundamental right. It is critical if communities are to flourish. The SDLP will support the building of at least 3,000 social homes each year – targeted at the areas with greatest social need.*

## Homelessness

If we are to successfully tackle homelessness, an initial step must be to place a duty of co-operation on statutory agencies. The SDLP tabled proposals to introduce this duty and will progress this through legislation as a first step in reducing homelessness.

## Children

The SDLP will relocate a Junior Minister from the Executive Office to become a Junior Minister for Children. This dedicated ministerial position will consolidate a range of functions previously discharged by various government ministers. This will bring together a number of key areas of policy and provisions for children and young people including poverty, health and education.

## Culture

The SDLP is committed to supporting community arts and the development of our artistic talents as economic drivers. To ensure that this important aspect of our society is kept on the agenda, the SDLP will form a Cultural Advisory Group to the Minister and introduce the long awaited Culture and Arts Strategy.

The SDLP is fully supportive of Derry City and Strabane Council and Belfast City Council's joint bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2023.

## Welfare

The SDLP will establish a Welfare Reform Committee with a remit to monitor the impact of welfare reform including, following the transfer of welfare powers to London, to identify interventions to protect those most impacted and to assess mitigation measures.

## Regeneration

The decision to delay and the subsequent decision to withdraw the regeneration proposals completely undermined the Reform of Local Government. The SDLP will reverse this decision allowing local councils to have the power to address social need and carry out regeneration schemes.



*Nichola Mallon  
Communities  
Spokesperson*

## **Acht na Gaeilge/Irish Language**

Leanann an SDLP ar aghaidh ag cur an Ghaeilge chun cinn agus bhí moltaí curtha faoi bhráid an Tionóil chun í a chosaint, a chur chun cinn agus cearta teanga do chainteoirí Ghaeilge ar fud an Tuaiscirt a fheabhsú. Ainneoin go raibh sé mar ghealltanas i roinnt comhaontuithe, níor tharla aon ghníomh ar an gceist. Leanfaidh an SDLP ar aghaidh ag cur ár moltaí le haghaidh Acht na Gaeilge chun cinn.

The SDLP continues to promote the Irish language and tabled proposals for an Irish Language Act to protect, promote and enhance the rights of Irish language speakers throughout the North. Despite it being a commitment in several agreements, no action has been taken on this issue. The SDLP will continue to advance our proposals for an Irish Language Act.

## **Excellence in Education**

### **Educational Excellence**

The SDLP recognises that education forms the building blocks of a shared society and that educational excellence is vital to achieving both social justice and long-term economic growth. We recognise the value of faith based education and the initiative of various churches in this regard. The SDLP is committed to parental choice and for access for pupils to faith based, integrated, Irish medium and state education. We want to see local schools based within local communities and supported by that community.



*Colin McGrath  
Education  
Spokesperson*

### **Curriculum**

There must be a comprehensive review of the primary and post-primary curricula to ensure that what is being taught in our classrooms meets the needs of the modern student. This will include the requirement to study a modern language to GCSE with a greater emphasis on learning languages at a younger age.

### **Academic Selection**

The SDLP does not support academic selection at 11. The current situation cannot be allowed to continue. The SDLP will establish a time bound Commission to explore the future for transfer, involving all relevant interests and to continue the work in seeking progress to identify the better management of the transfer tests.

### **Early Years**

The SDLP will implement bespoke, robust legislation for under 6s – an Early Education and Care Act. The SDLP will support the development of an early intervention model much like the pilot scheme in Derry City and Strabane Council. The first years of a child's life are where the foundations are laid and lifelong paths are established.

Early interventions, focused on children and their parents can have a profound impact on later years. These formative years impact on health, educational achievements and opportunities and it is vital that every child has the highest level of support.

## Coding

The SDLP will make it a priority to deliver coding and programming training to pupils at the earliest opportunity. A Digital Technology and Coding Academy is essential if we are to provide real-time, online coding and digital education for people of all ages across Northern Ireland.

## Youth Services

Young people need to have appropriate opportunities to be involved in structured activities that compliment and assist their education and development. Youth Services can play a key role in delivering this. They should be reinstated to their original role – a place young people can enjoy, develop and flourish.

# Sustaining Rural Society

## Agri-Food Sector

A competitive agri-food industry remains crucial to the North's growing export market and we must cultivate a flexible industry able to match growing demand. The result of the EU Referendum has opened up a gulf of uncertainty for the agriculture sector. It is vital that preparation is undertaken immediately to deal with any issues that will arise.

## Farming

The threat of Brexit poses significant issues for farmers and farming communities, in terms of income, tariffs and controls for food produced within Ireland. We will work to ensure that our farmers are not detrimentally impacted by the result of the Brexit Referendum.

## Fracking

The SDLP fundamentally opposes the introduction of fracking in Northern Ireland. There is no evidence to prove that fracking can be carried out safely and responsibly. The process of fracking raises serious concerns about the protection of our rural landscapes and the safety of our water supply. We support the development of new, safe and off shore renewable sources of energy and will develop legislation to ban fracking.

## Climate Change

As the only region across Ireland and Britain not to have climate change legislation, the SDLP will commit to the implementation of a Climate Change Bill.

## Rural Proofing

We will ensure the full application of rural proofing to promote equal and fair access to public services, transportation and high speed broadband and support for rural businesses.



*Patsy McGlone  
Agriculture,  
Environment &  
Rural Affairs  
Spokesperson*



## Fishing and Coastlines

The SDLP is committed to the protection of fisheries and the fishing industry. We will seek to develop a comprehensive fishing development plan for the onshore fish processing industry. To achieve this the devolution of fishery policy is vital. The SDLP will protect our coastlines, initially by mapping coastal erosion across the North and expanding the role and support for the Coastal Erosion Taskforce.

## Essential Infrastructure

### Roads

The SDLP will develop and implement a Roads Strategy for the next 20 years, in conjunction with the Dublin government, to ensure we have a modern roads infrastructure for the 21st Century.

### Development of the A5 and A6

The people of the West have been waiting many years for the delivery of suitable roads infrastructure. Investment in infrastructure upgrades throughout the West is critical to redeveloping our regional economy. This is essential to create growth and put communities here on a sustainable economic footing. The SDLP will prioritise the completion of the A5 and A6 projects.

### Public Transport

We will ensure the continued development of a modern railway and bus system throughout the North and across the island. The SDLP supports improved connectivity between our airports and rail services. The SDLP will continue to press for the speedy completion of the Belfast Public Transport Hub and as part of a wider anti-congestion strategy, the redevelopment of the York Street Interchange.

### Narrow Water Bridge

The SDLP remains committed to the Narrow Water Bridge project and will ensure that the development of the project is at the forefront of the next Executive's infrastructure agenda. As a new economic corridor it will transform the local economies of South Down and Louth by developing a stronger North-South economic partnership, increasing tourism and creating new opportunities for investment. The SDLP will ensure that all commitments to the project are met.

### Water Infrastructure

The SDLP remains opposed to the imposition of water charges on the people of Northern Ireland and in the Assembly we have continued to uphold that position.



*Daniel McCrossan  
Infrastructure  
Spokesperson*













# Déan an t-athrú a fhíorú



 Social Democratic Labour Party  
 @SDLPLive  
 SDLPLive

Published by:  
SDLP Headquarters  
121 Ormeau Rd  
Belfast  
BT7 1SH

Printed by:  
Minprint  
401 Castlereagh Rd  
Belfast  
BT5 6QP