

**FOR YOUR
FUTURE**



SDLP Westminster Manifesto 2010

CONTENTS

Our strategy for: A Labour government	4
A Conservative government	4
A Hung Parliament	5
Jobs	6
Safe, Shared Society	13
A United Ireland	21

SDLP PLANS FOR YOUR FUTURE:

- **Create 42,000 jobs** through a green new deal budget and an all-island corporation tax rate.
- **Lead on a shared future** by pushing shared values in every aspect of government activity.
- **Oppose cuts to frontline health services** and revolutionise public health by starting a special preventative health fund.
- **Ensure penalties fit the crime** by stiffening sentencing for violent crime and making deep reforms to protect victims.
- **Move on Irish unity** by restarting the forum for unity and establishing a northern panel in the Seanad Éireann.

MESSAGE FROM MARGARET RITCHIE

The forthcoming Westminster election will be fought on the important issues that affect you, your family and our entire community.

People may tell you that Westminster doesn't matter so much these days – but in reality it still does. Westminster controls the overall purse-strings and our own devolved government will have a lot less to spend if we don't secure the best possible deal from London.

It is not just much-needed finance for our public services – Westminster is also where many other key decisions are taken.

So it is important, at a time of cutbacks, that we are well represented at Westminster by people ready to work hard for the people of Northern Ireland.

We in the SDLP are proud of our record at Westminster.

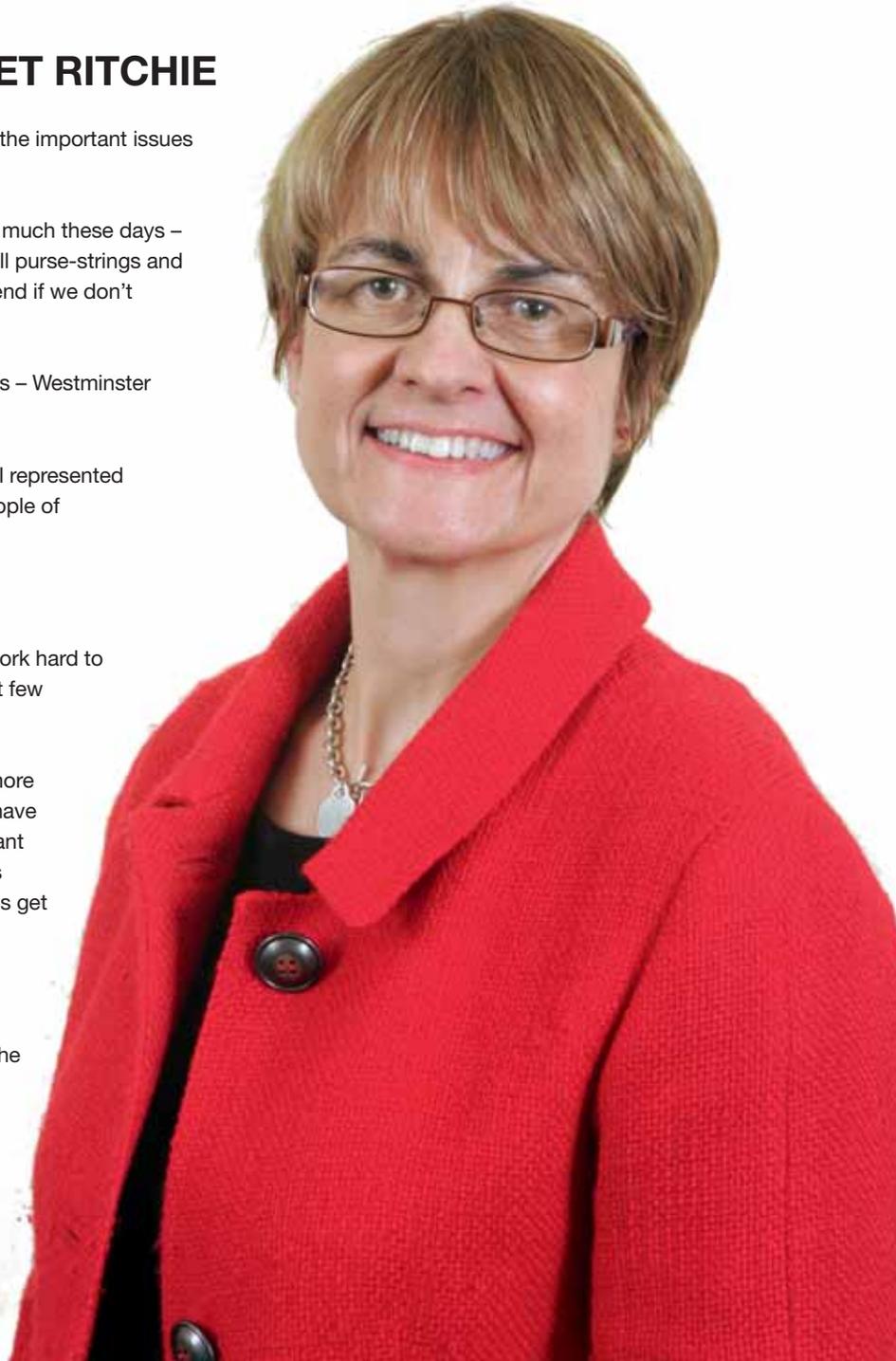
We will continue to take our seats in Westminster and work hard to defend and promote your interests. Our work in the next few years will build a better future for the North.

I also intend that the SDLP will lead in bringing a new, more modern, approach to our politics: I believe that people have had enough of the old adversarial politics with its constant bickering and stand-offs. We will offer a politics which is about partnership and reaching agreement so that things get done. Whether the issue is new jobs, agriculture, health, education, or tourism, we will work hard to build partnerships that will deliver for people on the ground.

If you agree with this approach I hope you will support the SDLP in this election.

The SDLP is brimming with ideas and ready to go to work – for your future.

Margaret Ritchie





WE'LL BE THERE

Many important decisions, on issues like tax, pensions, benefits, control over the banks, TV broadcasting and security are taken in Westminster, not Stormont.

It is essential that the working families of Northern Ireland have their needs represented where these crucial decisions are being taken.

With the DUP/Sinn Féin led Executive failing to use its powers to tackle our economic problems, it is all the more important that the SDLP is active at Westminster.

SDLP MPs are fighting for results at Westminster while DUP/Sinn Féin fail to deliver.

In fact Sinn Féin and the DUP actively rejected our proposals to create jobs and cut the cost of government.

The block grant – the amount of money the Northern Ireland Executive has to spend each year – is set at Westminster and the SDLP will be there making the case for the best possible deal.

We will fight to protect the Westminster funded welfare system – child benefits, pensions and disability benefits – from cuts and privatisation. We will oppose change that would unfairly impact on people who are the least well off.

And we will continue to challenge the British Government to get the best deal for all the people in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP has achieved much for you in Westminster and we are determined to achieve more.

Tá go leor baintre amach ag an SDLP ar do shon i Westminster, agus tá muid meáite ar níos mó fós a bhaint amach duit.

SDLP WESTMINSTER SUCCESSES

Children and families

1. Our campaign forced the Government to change their plans to remove the Childcare voucher tax exemption scheme.
2. We received a commitment from the Treasury to double the number of staff processing tax and child credit claims for cross-border workers.
3. We led the campaign for a reduction in VAT on child car seats that became law in 2009.
4. We have been hugely supportive of the strong measures tackling child poverty and will be pressing for further action in the next parliament.

Environment

1. We successfully fought for a strong Climate Change Act in Westminster.
2. We supported green job creating home energy efficiency policies in Westminster and prioritised efficient 'Warm Homes' in Northern Ireland.
3. We began a campaign against the relaxation of the commercial whaling ban.
4. We led the Westminster campaign for progress on the Millennium Development Goals that would integrate sustainable development into national policy and tackle biodiversity loss.

Protecting the vulnerable

1. We forced the Government to change their plans on abolishing the 10p tax rate.
2. When Desmond's clothing factory closed we fought to ensure the staff got their pensions.
3. We secured the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance for visually impaired people.
4. We led the Westminster campaign promoting the UN decade for action on road safety aimed at halving the projected increase in road deaths worldwide by 2030.

Protecting your savings

1. We secured a government commitment to allow credit unions in the North to offer the same breadth of services as in the South and England.
2. We persuaded the Westminster Treasury Committee to come to Belfast to investigate the Presbyterian Mutual Society debacle.
3. We ensured that the Ulster Bank kept its lending promises to make credit available to small businesses.
4. We secured a Treasury Committee probe into the Ulster Bank's treatment of its customers.

Older people

1. We campaigned against closures and privatisation of local post offices older people so depend on.
2. We pressed for a change to the excess charges for phone calls between land line phones, a lifeline for many older people, and mobiles.
3. We helped ensure the retention of the Post Office Card Account that many older people rely on.
4. And alongside tackling fuel poverty through Assembly actions we pushed the British government to tackle home energy costs.

International Affairs

1. We were the only Northern Ireland party to vote against the Iraq war and we lobbied for the current Iraq inquiry.
2. We pressed the British government to reach agreement on the cluster bomb treaty.
3. We led the Westminster campaign to tackle the impact of global poverty on women and called for government action to tackle human trafficking, particularly that related to the sex trade.
4. We highlighted global human rights abuses including the treatment of ethnic minorities in Iran and the attempt to introduce the death penalty for homosexuality in Uganda.

THE ELECTION RESULTS

There are three possible results of the coming election. All have huge implications for the North.

Because we take our seats in Westminster the SDLP is best placed to make the most of the opportunities that will arise and to counter the threats that will emerge.

We have a strategy for each possible outcome.

RESULT ONE: A LABOUR GOVERNMENT

Throughout the last 13 years the SDLP has supported many of the strong Labour government initiatives which have assisted working families, supported the NHS and tackled poverty.

But we have also been critical of Labour's bad initiatives and have constantly held the Labour Government to account.

“Gordon Brown does U-turn over childcare tax break”

The Sunday Times,
November 15, 2009

On childcare provision, 42 day detention and the ten pence tax rate we were influential in forcing the Government to rethink their plans.

And we were forthright in our insistence that the Government not give in to unionism.



“SDLP warns government not to give into DUP shopping list”

Noel McAdam, Belfast Telegraph,
August 4, 2009

No matter which party comes into power in May our approach will continue.

We will take each decision in the best interests of the people of the North.

We will fight any cuts to the Northern Ireland block grant.

We will continue to point to the savings possible by scrapping spending catastrophes of the current government such as the £5bn ID cards, the £12bn NHS IT system and the £20bn Trident nuclear submarines replacement.

We will push for a new approach to banking where a ‘Robin Hood’ levy of 50p on every

£1,000 of speculative transactions between banks has the ability to raise hundreds of billions of pounds every year and transform public finances.

We will challenge any attempts to dictate to Stormont how we spend the block grant.

And we will fight to ensure there are no cuts to frontline services.

RESULT TWO: A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

The now infamous Hatfield house talks between the Tories, the UUP and the DUP highlight the irresponsible nature of Conservative dealings in Northern Ireland.

It is highly likely that a Conservative government could be persuaded to appoint a unionist as the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

“a future Cameron government would be pro-unionist not honest broker”

Polly Toynbee, The Guardian,
February 13, 2010

A Northern unionist may become the London based Minister with responsibility for non-devolved justice issues and therefore control over MI5 operations in the North.

Because Sinn Féin and the DUP have decided that 'No Nationalist Need Apply' for the role of devolved Justice Minister – the North could end up with two unionist justice ministers.

The SDLP will ensure that they are in Westminster to oppose any such actions from a British Government.

“Conservative cuts to hit pay and pensions”

Channel 4 News,
Updated October 6, 2009

The Tories have bucked the international trend by proposing savage cuts even as the G20 World leaders were collectively deciding on a managed way out of recession.

There remains a serious threat of a double-dip recession in Northern Ireland brought on by a public expenditure crunch.

Northern Ireland has an historic reliance on the public sector, so planned Tory cuts to public sector budgets would be highly damaging.

Working people in the North need strong representation in London to fight against planned Tory spending cuts to frontline services.

Sinn Féin will not be there, the UUP and the DUP will be compromised and agreeable.

The SDLP will be the only Northern voice in Westminster able to stand against Conservative cuts.

RESULT THREE: A HUNG PARLIAMENT

With the clear possibility of a hung parliament it is essential that the North's representatives are in Westminster to take their seats.

“new polls point to hung parliament”

guardian.co.uk,
March 2, 2010

Northern Ireland politicians could be king-makers or deal breakers.

The SDLP will be there to ensure the best deal for all the people of the North, issue by issue, not through blind allegiance to any one party.

“A hung parliament won't stop the cuts”

The Sunday Times,
December 6, 2009

This approach will ensure we can stand against rises in national insurance and fuel duty and damaging cuts to frontline services and benefits.

And push for further power to be devolved to benefit the people of the North.

It is also crucial that there is a strong voice in Westminster to counter the ill-judged Unionist-Tory alliance.

Both the DUP and the UUP would happily use a unionist numerical advantage to back the British Government.

This would not be to ensure the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland but to gain greater political influence and concessions for unionism.

In the last Parliament, the Government were forced to rely on the DUP's votes in an attempt to pass their draconian legislation on 42 day detention.

The DUP received concessions in return.

They then proceeded to taunt those of us who stood against this damaging legislation.

In a hung parliament without a strong SDLP presence, instances like this could become commonplace.

The SDLP will take our seats in Westminster and represent all the people of Northern Ireland.



Jobs

BUILDING REAL JOBS

The SDLP has long led the debate on the economy in the North.

“Party’s £400m recovery blueprint”

Irish News, April 7, 2009

When the downturn began to impact on our jobs, economy, businesses, workers and families we launched a radical document, New Priorities in Difficult Times: Supporting the Northern Ireland Economy, starting a necessary debate about how we manage the impact of the downturn on businesses and vulnerable people in the North.

New Priorities outlines measures to support

our economy, create new jobs and protect existing ones.

At a time when the DUP and Sinn Féin are still showing incredible inaction we have shown ways in which money can be found to fund jobs.

“SDLP’s plea for economy debate falls on deaf ears”

Belfast Telegraph, April 8, 2009

Given the opportunity the SDLP have taken decisive action:

Through her Department Minister Margaret Ritchie chose to prioritise the warm homes scheme and the construction of more social housing than for over a decade.

These schemes create jobs, bring immediate stimulus to the economy, protect the vulnerable and help conserve the environment.

Proposals from our New Priorities document, adopted by government departments, which will help protect and create jobs:

- A wage subsidy scheme.
- Further funding and assistance for apprenticeships.
- Opportunities for graduate training.
- Immediate access to enhanced training provision for the recently unemployed.
- Incentives for the extension of the broadband network to assist rural businesses.

AMBITION TO CREATE 42,000 JOBS

The SDLP is the only party in the North with the ambition, appetite and strong plans necessary to boost our economy and create thousands of jobs.

By implementing the all-island harmonisation of corporation tax we can create 12,000 jobs in 5 years.

And by designing a new job creation budget based on 'green new deal' principles, we can create 30,000 jobs.

The SDLP have already begun applying some of these principles, but Northern Ireland requires a full Executive budget committed to investment in the construction of low-carbon homes, the warm homes scheme, renewable energy expansion, public sector energy efficiency, public transport and waste management.

These fiscal ambitions are backed up by the NI Economic Reform Group and the green agenda by the CBI, the Sustainable Development Commission, and the Ulster Farmers Union amongst others.

Gerry Adams is "not interested in managing the economy."

The DUP have U-turned on corporation tax.

The SDLP is the only party in the North with a job creation agenda.

BUSINESSES BUILD JOBS

Of paramount importance is the need to stimulate job creation in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP recognise that nothing encourages job creation better than fiscal incentives. The North must become a business friendly low tax region.

We will continue to fight for an all-island rate of Corporation Tax and press for the reordering public expenditure to achieve maximum stimulus to the local economy.

"The SDLP plea for exceptional changes is consistent with the pleas being made by a number of the social partners speaking for businesses and employees." John Simpson, Belfast Telegraph, April 8, 2009

To create jobs we will:

- Provide fiscal incentives to businesses to encourage investment in people.
- Fight for an all-island rate of corporation tax.
- Establish an Executive sub-committee on jobs – Making the Executive work for you.
- Push for the reinstatement of Executive programme funds to finance a job strategy.
- Focus job creation help on small firms, social enterprises and new businesses engaged in innovation.

- Reform public procurement so it becomes more accessible to small businesses and further eliminate red tape.
- Ensure prompt payment to firms working on government contracts.
- Press the Executive to fulfil its commitment to building a multi-sports stadium – creating hundreds of jobs.
- Build more social housing – creating jobs and assisting the vulnerable.
- Invest in hospital construction – creating jobs and improving health.
- Build new schools and maintain others – creating jobs and benefiting our children's future.
- Invest in roads maintenance – creating jobs and assisting business transport.
- Ensure childcare provision that encourages parents back into work.
- Continue to fight for the relocation of public sector jobs (proposed in the Bain review) in order to assist economic growth in rural areas.
- Reduce VAT on the refurbishment and extension of existing homes to 5% – creating construction jobs and improving living standards.
- Extend the natural gas network – creating jobs and lowering home fuel costs.

PLANNING – OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

It is imperative that we reform the Planning Service in Northern Ireland.

The DUP Minister signed up to this fundamental overhaul in the current Programme for Government but has yet to deliver.

It is still taking far too long to process applications, especially major job creating applications.

Planning must be an effective and efficient service – business friendly.

Crucially then the Planning Service must provide competitive processing time targets, key for local businesses and businesses competing for mobile international investment.

The service must provide businesses, and the public, transparency and openness, and an efficient system for third party right of appeal.



JOBS THROUGH INNOVATION

The SDLP believe the Northern Ireland Executive has failed to show the necessary commitment to the development of a long-term economic strategy.

The DUP and Sinn Féin's refusal to introduce a new budget following the economic downturn has held the economy back for 18 months.

It is essential that we use the current downturn as a catalyst for future growth.

We must adopt the proposal of the Matrix report to enable business-led innovation communities and begin to introduce a positive risk culture into business ventures in the North.

We need a new Budget and Programme for Government built on a simple, robust jobs and innovation strategy for the region.

The North requires strategic cross-departmental planning on job protection and creation.

We must assist InvestNI in selling ourselves better. Our highly-skilled and innovative workforce consistently prove capable of producing the goods.

We must reward this achievement by attracting better, more sustainable, high quality jobs through Foreign Direct Investment.

DETI and Invest NI must integrate their long-term strategies for economic growth

with the Irish Government plans to create the best research, innovation and commercialisation environment in Europe, 'The Innovation Island.'

Our economies face common challenges, so it makes sense to find common solutions.

Policy-makers the world over have thrown their support behind creating more 'green collar' jobs and increasing 'green' investments to counter the present downturn.

EU financial support directed towards Northern Ireland will diminish significantly over the coming years and EU funding available will take the form of support for work by two or more jurisdictions combining in areas such as innovation.

In these difficult economic times it makes long term economic sense to collaborate and use our unique natural resources to support job creation and development of industries that can play a role in managing climate change.

With ingenuity and industry, we can build a strong all-island recovery plan with coordinated investment in jobs and green growth at its centre.

To assist innovation we will:

- Give Invest NI greater freedom from DETI, allowing it to become more responsive to business needs.
- Cut bureaucracy by scrapping the ineffective OFMDFM Economic Advisory Forums.

- Consolidate the departmental economic policy units to create a new single advisory unit, manned by people with business practice and economic expertise, not career civil servants.
- Improve cooperation between business development agencies, North and South to end the damaging myth that Invest NI and the IDA are essentially in competition.
- Campaign for devolution of energy resources.
- Invest in innovation and development of our renewable energy sector.

JOBS, SKILLS AND EDUCATION

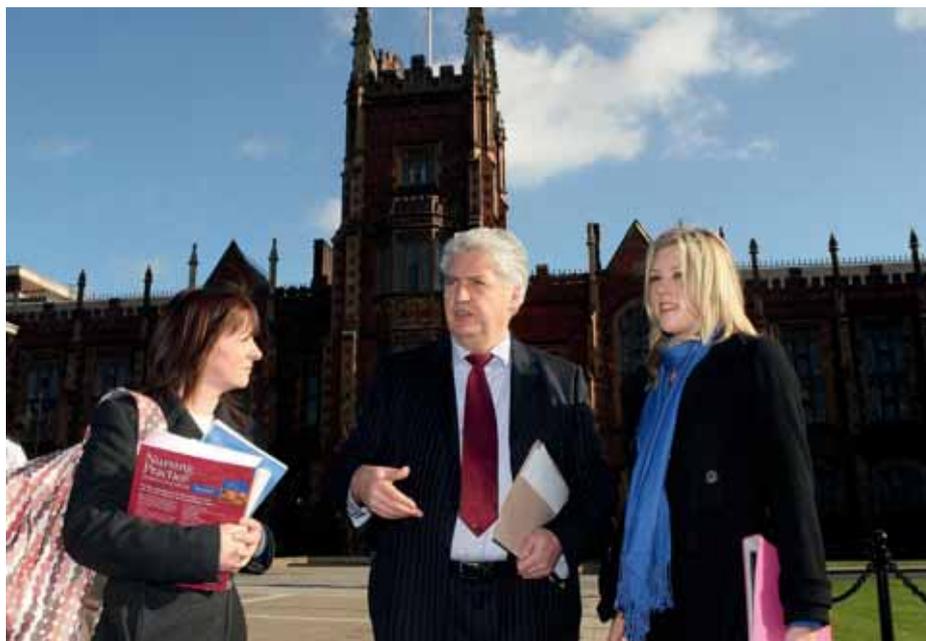
Investing in educational excellence is key to achieving both social justice and long-term

economic growth for our shared society.

Tá infheistiú i gcúrsaí sár-oideachais thar a bheith tábhachtach má tá idir chóir shóisialta agus fhás fadtéarmach le baint amach dár sochaí roinnte.

There is a great need for a more robust focus on attainment in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) at all levels of ability in order to provide our children and, as a consequence, our businesses with the necessary skills base to excel in this era of global competition.

If we are to seriously commit to economic development through innovation and renewable energies we must invest in our young people.



There is a pressing need for a reassessment of patterns of investment in education and suitable investment must be made to support raising standards through education reform, as progress will only be made if we strive for excellence.

Through committing this investment and placing a focus on international best practice we can achieve high standards across the education spectrum.

To develop research and skills we will:

- Sustain investment in research and innovation with a focus on applied business led research.
- Reward research excellence.
- Develop greater cross-border co-operation between colleges and the institutes of technology to meet the needs of local communities and businesses.
- Ensure strong engagement between schools, colleges and universities and industry and businesses.
- Tackle the numeracy and literacy deficit in our schools.
- Provide demanding learning which, reflects the needs of the modern workforce, is professionally taught and well resourced.
- Provide learners with well resourced, professional career guidance which clearly signals opportunities in growth industries.
- Create an online 'Open Faculty for Innovation' to cultivate a culture that thinks innovation, works innovation and grows innovation.



JOBS IN TOURISM

Northern Ireland still has much untapped potential in the tourism industry.

Great work has already been undertaken to ensure we are beginning to reap the rewards.

But we must enable businesses to continue to invest in this success by providing fiscal stimulus for infrastructure and staff development.

Necessary support must be provided to ensure expansion of our marketing reach beyond our core market.

And in the short term we must attract the British and Irish stay-at-home tourists who have increased during the downturn.

The clear strategy based around signature projects must be properly resourced so that each project has the capital works and stand-alone narrative to fully engage visitors.

We can be proud of the customer service and hospitality we show our visitors, but there is always room for improvement.

There is huge potential for job creation in the tourism sector and investment is required to provide retraining opportunities for some of those who have recently lost their jobs in the retail downturn.

We must enable diversification into the growing eco-tourism business though direct assistance to businesses and investment in associated sustainable transport infrastructure.

If we act now Northern Ireland can still reap some benefits from the London 2012 Olympics.

While we may not now see direct benefits from the games themselves the opportunities available to sell our region to a global audience should not be missed.

JOBS IN RURAL AREAS

We must enable the rural economy to compete and thrive during uncertain economic times and, crucially, to sustain itself in preparation for the upturn when it happens.

Supporting the continuation of sustainable farming helps maintain the countryside and contributes to rural development.

We need specific protection for smaller farmers - for environmental as well as economic reasons. It's in all our interests to remain able to buy local produce.

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

Déanfaidh muid ár ndícheall a chinntiú go mbeidh an timpeallacht tuaithe mar áit chónaithe agus oibre, mar a bhíodh i dtolamh.

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

We believe there is a need to develop a rural 'white paper' for the North which would ensure resources for a measurable and enforceable rural development action plan.

To create rural jobs we will:

- Work in conjunction with other Westminster MPs from rural regions to ensure the next government puts

forward the needs of rural Ireland when negotiating reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

- We will work to ensure the British government also represents our fishing industry. As with agriculture, Northern needs are often better represented by the Irish government during European negotiations on fish quotas.
 - Pursue the development of a healthy indigenous renewable energy industry to contribute to sustaining our rural economy.
 - Encourage the development of small scale renewables to enable those in rural areas to create their own energy and gain the benefits from feed in tariffs.
 - Ensure full expansion of the high-speed broadband network in order to eliminate the digital divide.
 - Ensure provision of high quality public services in rural areas to promote
- economic independence, equality, minimise rural exclusion and combat isolation.
 - Fight for quality rural childcare provision to enable those parents who want to work the freedom to do so.
 - Enhance opportunities for farm diversification.
 - Continue our commitment to decentralisation of public sector jobs to rural areas.
 - Enable greater opportunities for development of the forestry industry.
 - Provide incentives for development of rural micro-engineering schemes.
 - Ensure rural transportation networks provide for business and community needs.
 - Support rural schools and healthcare provision to ensure rural dwellers can remain in their communities.





SUSTAINABLE JOBS

Our island region could become a world leader in sustainable development and create jobs.

We were dismayed that the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit failed to produce results that will protect our environment and younger generations.

Bhí díoma orainn nár éirigh leis an Copenhagen Climate Change Summit torthaí a bhaint amach a b'fhéadfadh ár dtimpeallacht agus ár n-óige a chosaint.

The transition to a sustainable future requires coordinated international effort, enshrined in global agreement.

However we believe our small region should not simply blame the failure of others.

We can show leadership and boost our economy through the use of more energy efficient technologies in our communities, at home and at work.

To progress towards a sustainable island we must begin by instituting a new all-island spatial planning strategy.

Through our North-South Makes Sense campaign the SDLP have promoted this type of all-Ireland development.

As our European Union funding is reduced and prospects for funding now lie in cross-jurisdictional applications, North-South working provides great opportunities.

The North South Ministerial Council agenda must be expanded to include climate change so as to assess ways in which we can develop our natural resources for the benefit of our environment.

And through the British-Irish Council we should begin to assess the benefit for this maritime region of greater co-operation in the development of renewable energies.

To enhance sustainability we will:

- Work with the Dublin and Edinburgh Governments to invest further in development of world leading tidal and wave technology and create lasting jobs in a growing industry.
- Push for an all-Ireland waste strategy that has at its core strong prevention measures, provides the economy of scale to reduce costs and preserves the attractiveness of our countryside, towns and cities.
- Fight for an all-island transport strategy, providing greater planning for the growth of the island's ports and manage our island's airport expansion through a regional aviation strategy.
- Remain committed to provision of better public transport to cater for the needs of rural and urban dwellers, especially those with disabilities.
- Develop a sustainable rural transport policy with an inbuilt rural road safety strategy.
- Campaign for an all-island Independent Environmental Protection Agency.
- Push for a single all-island Energy Regulator
- Continue our campaign for 20 mph zones in built-up areas.
- Continue our commitment to sustainable transport, most recently illustrated through Minister Margaret Ritchie's investment in Belfast's cycling infrastructure.
- Scope the feasibility of a cycle rental scheme for Belfast.



Safe, Shared Society

The SDLP wants to make a success of the North - not just its economy but crucially its divided society.

The greatest poverty and alienation now occur in areas where the population is single identity.

There is an overwhelming social and economic case for a Shared Future before even taking account of the moral imperative.

It is scandalous that young people in the North can reach adulthood without interacting with people from the other tradition. It is simply wrong that our children are being educated apart.

If we believe in Social Justice we must aim to build a Shared Future.

People generally, particularly young people, are ahead of politicians in relation to the building of a Shared Future.

Unfortunately the DUP and Sinn Féin have displayed no desire or designs towards true sharing.

They have illustrated this through their fallouts in the Executive, their inability to complete a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy with targeted goals and their leadership failure on developing key symbols of progress like a shared future stadium.

The development of a multi-sports stadium would not simply be a symbol of a desire for a new shared north, but if strategically sited as a city stadium, would bring the benefits of jobs, regeneration and tourism income.

The DUP and Sinn Féin are failing. At their best they pander to tolerance and peaceful co-existence. This should not be a final destination.

We desire a future that is truly shared, where there is mutual respect and increased integration.

YOUR COMMUNITY

As we aim to fulfil our vision of a just and prosperous island we will ensure the vulnerable in our society are protected and empowered.

No local politician has done more for the most vulnerable members of our society than SDLP leader and Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie, through her distribution of additional fuel poverty and cold weather payments and vision of eradicating fuel poverty for vulnerable people.

By taking our seats in Westminster the SDLP can have a strong influence on many decisions which directly affect the day-to-day lives of our vulnerable people.

In many ways it is our region's most vulnerable people who are most affected by the powers remaining in Westminster and most in need of strong representation.

In the last Parliament SDLP MPs led campaigns highlighting the needs of people with disabilities and their carers; for Christmas bonuses for pensioners and carers; for the extension of free TV licences to pensioners of all ages; for support for dementia research; for quality housing care and support; and highlighted the plight of those suffering due to rising fuel costs.

In the coming parliament we will:

- Continue to campaign for the immediate restoration of the earnings link for the state pension.
- Fight for the increase of the winter fuel payment to £500.
- Show respect to our older generations by putting an end to upper age limits in work and insurance.
- Call for specific support for older and disabled jobseekers.
- Ensure the automatic payment of benefits.
- Push for the reinstatement of executive programme funds to support cross-

cutting community issues.

- Fight for the introduction of social tariffs on energy provision for older people and disabled people.
- Continue to press for a Northern Ireland Autism Act similar to that recently introduced in Westminster.
- Push for the creation of a special Local Government administered hardship fund to provide direct assistance to households in dire need.
- Press the rural development Minister to adequately use her budget to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion.
- Continue to press OFMDFM to deliver on the Executive's anti-poverty commitments and for Northern Ireland specific child poverty targets.
- Continue to demand a full-time, adequately funded older person's Commissioner to ensure that the voice of older people is heard and that they are involved in all policy-making decisions.
- Ensure access to Essential Skills, Apprenticeships and Lifelong Learning for all.
- Tackle the lack of appropriate independent and supported living opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Provide better access to meaningful daytime activities and support in finding appropriate job opportunities for people with learning disability and mental health problems.
- Press the government to lift asylum seekers from destitution by setting Asylum support rates to a minimum of 70% of income support.





YOUR MONEY

Many of the tough decisions affecting the pound in your pocket are taken at Westminster. The SDLP will continue to be there to fight your case.

Socraítear roinnt mhaith de na cinní a bhaineann le 'hairgead I do phóca' thair I Westminster. Beidh an SDLP ann ar do shon le do chás a throid.

In the last year the SDLP has led the way in protecting the savings of the people of Northern Ireland.

While the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment sat on their hands, the SDLP maintained the pressure on the Treasury to make urgent changes to the rules on Credit Union lending.

We will continue to fight for Credit Unions.

While the banks continued to ignore borrowers here, and Northern Ireland became a banking black hole, the SDLP secured commitments from the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, the Taoiseach and the Finance Minister on behalf of Northern borrowers.

We will continue to fight for fair borrowing rates.

As highly-paid bankers, complicit in the economic crisis continued to receive huge bonuses, the Royal Bank of Scotland were attempting to breach trade-union agreements on terms and conditions to their lower-paid staff, the SDLP led the fight against these cuts.

We will continue to fight for fair pay and conditions.

As far back as 2000, the SDLP saw the strong need for better regulation and fairness in the banking system and adopted the Robin Hood Tax as party policy.

We will continue to fight for regulation and fairness in the banking industry.

We have highlighted the pressures people face in relation to fuel costs and Financial Inclusion.

We will be there to press for better assistance for people with debt or money management issues and make it illegal for financial institutions to discriminate against people due to tenure or postcode.

While DUP ministers played pass the parcel with the Treasury, it was the SDLP who persuaded the Westminster Public Accounts Committee to come to Belfast to investigate the debacle over the Presbyterian Mutual Society.

We will continue to fight for the best deal for all Presbyterian Mutual Society savers, not just the biggest investors.

We started the campaign that prevented the Government from removing the childcare voucher tax exemption scheme which helped low income families pay for childcare.

We will continue to fight for working families.

And if the Conservatives form the next government the SDLP will fight Tory tax cuts for the rich and tax rises for everyone else.

The SDLP will continue to champion your causes in Westminster and Stormont.

WELFARE AND BENEFITS

Currently all decisions on benefits are made at Westminster.

In the next Parliament, if elected, the Labour Government will continue their plans for welfare reform.

The Conservatives are talking tough about their proposed changes and cuts.

The SDLP stood against the damaging changes proposed by the Labour government and we will do so again in the next Parliament.

We believe the time is right to begin to discuss the best way to cater for welfare provision in Northern Ireland.

We are committed to helping people back into work and simplifying the benefits system in a measured compassionate way.

Changes must not come as a threat to those in the benefits system.

Instead adequate, individually tailored support should be provided to assist people into suitable employment.

We will not accept unfair stress being placed on the most vulnerable in our society by the imposition of eligibility testing for the continued receipt of necessary support.

By taking our seats in Westminster and refusing to be tied to any one party, the SDLP can best support our society's most vulnerable people.



COMMUNITY SAFETY

We welcome the devolution of policing and justice to Northern Ireland. It has not come soon enough.

We hope that by entrusting local politicians with these powers they can rise to the challenge.

Nationalism is angry at the DUP/Sinn Féin carve-up which deviated from the Good Friday Agreement to ensure that 'No Nationalist Need Apply' for the Justice Ministry.

But we remain steadfastly committed to combating crime and ensuring safer communities for everybody.

During the legislative processes necessary for devolution we laid out in detail – and were the only party to do so – the need to see reform in the justice system.

Devolution must deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

Through devolution local people have, for the first time in a generation, been provided with the opportunity to influence how the criminal justice system meets their needs.

Much change has already taken place through the Patten reforms to policing. It is a template of what can be achieved.

We will steadfastly protect the advances of Patten which has brought positive change in the last decade.

We will continue to fight to ensure we achieve a truly representative and fully accountable police service.

And we will continue our work on the Policing Board and in the new justice structures to keep delivering change.

Reform must proceed on three levels. The issues identified below are indicative only of what should happen after 12 April 2010.

The funding issues surrounding the proposed new police and emergency services college, a new prison, the Prison Ombudsman and the Parole Commissioners must be addressed.

Legislation must be put in place to:

- Create a Sentencing Guidelines Council – an upgraded version of best practice in England and Wales.
- Review of knife crime penalties and offences.
- Establish a Charter of Rights for victims of crime.
- Place the Prisoner Ombudsman on a statutory footing.

And new policies must be developed to deliver:

- A Charter of Rights for all victims of crime.
- Reform of Prison Service.
- Reform of Public Prosecution Service.
- A review of criminal law on the scale and extent of offences.
- The provision of Legal Aid.
- Stronger equity monitoring across the range of criminal justice organisations.
- Youth Justice and crime diversion.

The SDLP is committed to better serving the victims of crime. We will fight to ensure the opportunities provided by the recent devolution of justice powers are not lost through lack of action or ambition by politicians in the North.

A HEALTHY NORTH

The importance of our personal health and wellbeing and the extent to which our environment can affect how we feel and act have rightly gained increased attention.

Tá níos mó airdre dírithe anois ar sláinte phearsanta agus ar shon an duine agus ar an dóigh a dtéann an timpeallacht thart orainn i bhfeidm orainn, mar a ba cheart agus ba chóir.

Increases in conditions including obesity and diabetes are often partly caused by environmental factors.

Investment in health education and preventative health is therefore critical. This can often save money, but does require innovation and long term commitment.

There are many small changes that we can begin to make immediately, from compulsory front-of-packet food labelling, promoting the mental health benefits of physical exercise and immediately implementing a ban on the display of tobacco products at point of sale.

Health can also be an important driver of economic growth and prosperity.

There is an increasing realisation of the importance that investment in our health will play in the future development of our society and economy.

The Northern Ireland Executive must develop better integration of health, social and environment policies so we can begin to tackle the significant health inequalities that prevail in the North.

These challenges fall to a wide range of people of differing specialisms including social workers, nurses, cleaning staff and allied health professionals.

The SDLP are committed to supporting these individuals through adequate staffing levels and appropriate training provision to ensure they can treat patients with dignity.

To assist them we must strive for an efficient and effective system of free NHS health care, where the needs of patients are paramount and accessible on the basis of clinical need.

Worryingly, the economic pressures we are currently facing impose yet more pressures upon our health service.

We do not support ring-fencing of the health budget – as there are still opportunities to reduce bureaucracy – but these savings must be reinvested for the benefit of patients.

The SDLP voted against the budget in 2008 due to the imposition of indiscriminate efficiency savings upon the health service.

We will be there in Westminster to protect frontline services from cuts – ensuring the best possible services for patients.

We will be there to fight reductions to the Northern Ireland block grant – cuts that would be hugely detrimental to our health provision.

And we will be there to stand against a reduction in frontline health professionals

through cutbacks to government employees.

As we look to ensure a high-quality health service we must develop ways to innovate.

To boost our health we will:

- Create an Executive programme fund to kick start a long-term cross departmental preventative health strategy.
- Provide for an ‘upstream’ focus on prevention and health improvement and support for self management for those with long-term conditions.
- Develop greater cross-border cooperation on health to provide the optimum care for all, especially those in rural areas.
- Call on the Minister to publish the all-island health strategy commissioned by the Departments of Health North and South and implement its positive recommendations.
- Use economies of scale to provide specialist services on an all-island basis, rather than the emotionally and financially costly option of flying patients to England for treatment.
- Learn the lessons of the imminent cross-border health collaboration on children’s cardiac services for application in other areas of provision.
- Scope the extension of all-island working to ensure mental health provision for mothers and babies and an eating disorder unit.
- Ensure carers receive appropriate emotional and financial support and respite opportunities so their own health and wellbeing is looked after.

- Push for the creation of an obesity prevention strategy.
- Fight for cross-departmental funding for a cancer support allowance to reduce the financial strain on individuals fighting cancer.
- Continue to fight for more rigorous child protection measures and better criminal records information sharing on a North-South and East-West basis.

ACTION ON DRUGS

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is out of date. It is failing to provide our young people with adequate protection both from illegal drugs and ‘legal highs’.

It places a duty on the state to prove a drug is dangerous before it is banned, yet pharmaceutical companies have to prove drugs are safe before they can be sold.

The SDLP wants a new misuse of drugs bill which will:

- Allow Ministers to temporarily classify new drugs and drug groups until they are proven safe.
- Review the role of the advisory council on the misuse of drugs with a view to extending its powers and influence over education and health promotion.
- Devolve powers to Northern Ireland.
- Strengthen statutory support for drug prevention and rehabilitation schemes.

CHALLENGING ABUSE

We hold grave concerns at the findings of the Commission to inquire into Child Abuse report (the Ryan Report) published in May 2009. Such neglect and abuse of children

and young people's human rights must be subject to criminal law.

Children who were placed by state authorities in Northern Ireland into establishments or settings where they became victims of abuse are entitled to support and redress.

We will press the Executive to agree to an independent inquiry into institutional child abuse in the North.

We will seek agreement for an appropriate North-South mechanism to discuss the impact of clerical abuse across the island.

Finally we will press the Executive to provide funding to support helpline and counselling services which are now facing new demands.



OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Control of most children's issues are now devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, but the support we give our children cannot be held up as an example of devolution delivering better results for the people of the North.

Our education system is embroiled in crisis and little leadership is being shown in tackling child poverty.

The SDLP will continue to fight for the educational and social needs of our children and young people.

In Westminster we strongly supported the Labour Government's attack on child poverty, fought against the changes to childcare provision and continue to stand against increases to university tuition fees.

In Stormont we have led political talks aimed at consensus on the 11 Plus crisis.

The 11 Plus was educationally unsound and socially unjust.

But the Minister has created the crisis by refusing to plan for what comes after the 11 Plus.

“We got it wrong on the 11 Plus Sinn Fein MLA says”

Belfast Telegraph, December 3, 2009

The SDLP have led the Unionist parties to accept they must compromise and support

the interim solution previously proposed by the Minister.

We will work to encourage the Minister to change her position.

We will continue to be there to challenge the Minister with reasoned argument, even when it appears futile.

We welcome that the Catholic schools have begun implementing such an interim period however the needs of local people and schools must be regarded in the change process.

Unless all education sectors move forward together, the inequalities in our education system will be entrenched for the next generations.

As uncertainty prevails over the future of post-primary transfer, special educational needs provision and changes to school management, the SDLP will work to ensure certainty for children, teachers and parents.

To protect our children we will:

- Champion the cause of rural schools as the heart of our local communities.
- Ensure better cooperation between the departments of Education and Employment and Learning to cater for disabled young people as they transfer from school to further education and employment.
- Continue to lead the campaign against the removal of support for those children with Special Education Needs.
- Continue to oppose the removal of statementing.

- Press for better provision for our children in the early years of education – the stage where many children fall behind.
- Press for the prioritising of early intervention strategies.
- Fight to ensure parity of Surestart provision with England.
- Ensure protection of the extended schools programme.
- Extend the provision of free nursery places to all 3 and 4 year olds.
- Implement a NEET prevention strategy providing necessary resources to tackle the growing numbers of children and young people Not in Education, Employment or Training.
- Challenge the Minister to assist young teachers to find full time employment.

SPORT, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The SDLP aim to develop, maintain and promote Northern Ireland's rich cultural heritage.

We recognise Northern Ireland has the lowest per capita spending on the arts across the regions and are keen to see investment in the arts increase.

Culture and the Arts provide great opportunity for renewal and reconciliation and the SDLP support incentives to encourage the promotion of community arts on a cross-community basis.

The SDLP will continue to fight for the introduction of an Irish Language Act, through the introduction of our own private member's legislation if necessary.

Leanfaidh an SDLP leis an troid chun Acht na Gaelige a thabhairt isteach, trínár reachtaíocht príobháideach s'againn féin a thabhairt isteach más gá.

And we will attempt to persuade Sinn Féin that their decision to give up on the Irish Language Act for petty concessions at Hillsborough was a mistake.

Agus déanfaidh muid iarracht cur ina luí ar Shinn Féin go ndearna siad meancóg sa mhéid is gur thréig siad Acht na Gaelige ar mhaithe le lamháltais shuaracha ag Caisleán Hillsborough.

For too long, sport, art and cultural diversity in Ireland has been a source of conflict. We believe they can become an opportunity for a shared future.

We remain committed to a shared future stadium for the region as a symbol of sport as a unifying force.

We will continue to encourage the GAA, Irish rugby and the football governing bodies, as they work from varied starting points, to promote cross-community involvement in sport and to eradicate sectarianism.

It is vital that the major sporting organisations show leadership and we encourage the consideration of the introduction of sporting anthems accessible to the entire community.

It is also imperative that organisations respect the rights of young men and women to represent the team of their choosing under the principles laid out in the Good Friday Agreement.

BRITISH SECURITY INFLUENCE

The SDLP argue for primacy for national security with the PSNI – not MI5. The recent Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Report “The Omagh bombing: some remaining questions” confirms both this need and the glaring gaps in the accountability of the security service.

Not only do MI5 lack accountability, but they have demonstrated their willingness to act beyond their remit and beyond the limits of the law. The findings of ‘Operation Ballast’ by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland confirm this.

We remain deeply concerned that Sinn Féin's January 2007 deal with the British Government made the situation worse and left the way clear for MI5 to take a larger, deeper and less accountable role in Northern Ireland.

It is unacceptable that crucial security decisions affecting the people of this region will be taken from London while local representatives and the public are kept in the dark.

The SDLP are committed to ensuring that the security services in Northern Ireland are held accountable to the people of this region. This argument is the proper one confirmed by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Omagh report and emphasised by growing issues around current MI5 activity in the North.



A United Ireland

LEAVING THE UNION - A CREDIBLE PLAN FOR IRISH UNITY

The SDLP is committed to a united Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement established the democratic basis for unity and by providing the public with a credible and achievable vision we believe we can persuade the doubters.

SDLP Nationalism recognises that nationalists have a responsibility to detail what a United Ireland would look like and how it would work.

That's why we encourage all political parties on the island to join a reconstituted Forum for Unity where we will present our views on how to progress the unity agenda. Irish unity can be encouraged by a prosperous and reconciled Northern Ireland.

Nationalists should continue and deepen their contribution to creating a prosperous and reconciled Northern Ireland.

The SDLP envisage unity as a coming-together rather than a takeover.

In a united Ireland we see the continuation of a Stormont assembly in the North and we foresee the same rights and protections that we insisted upon in the North, applying in support of minorities in a new all-island arrangement.

Already other Irish political parties are recognising the value in the SDLP's ideas.

The SDLP are the only party with a credible and achievable vision for unity.

Is í an SDLP an t-aon pháirtí amháin a bhfuil fíis acu ar aontacht na tíre seo, atá inchreidtre agus sodhéanta.

MAKING GOVERNMENT STRONGER ACROSS IRELAND

Over the past two years big decisions have been taken by the Dublin government which affect the lives of many in the North.

NAMA is the biggest player in the Northern property market yet the Assembly and Executive had no role in its development or key decisions about its creation.

In the past month Northern Ireland was again left out of key decisions which led to the placing of the Quinn Group in administration and which threatens the very existence of First Trust.

There is an incontrovertible case for direct Northern involvement in the Oireachtas in order to ensure the decisions taken which affect the entire island have been

scrutinised by representatives of both jurisdictions in Ireland.

To address this governance deficit the SDLP is proposing:

- Northern party leaders are given attendance and speaking rights in Dáil Éireann on Northern Ireland and cross border issues.
- The Assembly Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs have attendance and speaking rights on parallel Dáil Committees, and vice versa.
- A panel of 11 members in Seanad Éireann representing Northern Ireland, appointed by the major parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The SDLP also supports the immediate establishment of the North – South inter-parliamentary forum and the all-island civic forum.

Having a group of Northern politicians fully participate in and positively contribute to the work of the Oireachtas will provide the Southern electorate with confidence that the North can make a positive contribution to Irish life.

Equally such participation could provide further opportunities for valuable North-South engagement and a positive impact upon political workings in the North as our elected representatives benefit from involvement in politics at the national level.



DEVOLUTION MUST DELIVER

The SDLP wants more power in Irish hands so we can fight for your needs.

The Executive and Assembly should take control of its own finances.

In far too many areas of budgetary and departmental spending, DUP/Sinn Féin are simply doing a ‘cut and paste’ job with Westminster legislation.

The DUP then blame Westminster for everything – they can’t have it both ways.

It is the duty of the Assembly to ensure that when public spending cuts are imposed their impact on service provision is minimised.

DEVOLUTION AND EQUALITY

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

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

The SDLP will continue to work tirelessly to make Northern Ireland a welcoming and safe place for migrant workers.

It is unacceptable that those who want a better life for themselves and their families can feel threatened and unwelcome in our society. The SDLP wants to see all workers respected as equals and benefiting equally under the law.

Internally the party is reviewing how we encourage women within the political arena so as to ensure we continue our achievements in promoting equal opportunities in public life.

The SDLP will continue our sustained lobbying for a strong Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

We remain convinced that a Bill of Rights can support the common ground that does exist in our society, and provide protections and principles upon which we can agree despite our differences.

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

The SDLP is committed to equality at all levels of devolved government.

Unfortunately, it is still a fight to ensure that minority communities are fairly represented in local government.

Just last year the SDLP was supported by the Equality Commission when we challenged unionist gerrymandering in Lisburn Borough Council.

As the reform of local government continues through the Review of Public

Administration, the SDLP will be there to ensure the changes to council powers provide equality of representation.

Coming major changes to service provision will also have cost implications – the SDLP will be there to ensure no undue costs are heaped on the ratepayer.

And any costs incurred because of delays in the move to fewer councils must not fall on the ratepayer.

In Westminster, the SDLP will call for the extension of control over local elections to be held locally – because we firmly believe that despite the problems, when local representatives are entrusted with extra power they step up to the plate.

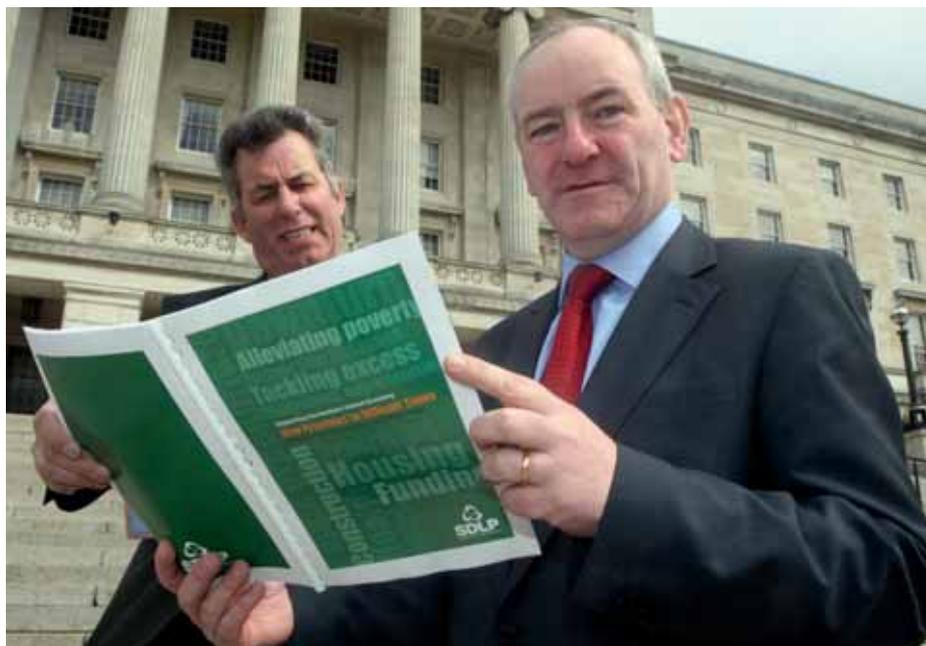
EXTENDING DEVOLUTION

The SDLP will fight in the next parliament to extend the powers available to the people of the North.

Unlike Gordon Brown we do not see the devolution of policing and justice powers as “the final end.” [The Independent, March 10, 2010.]

There is much more that can and must be done.

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



“SDLP delivers a damning critique of the story so far”

Noel McAdam, Belfast Telegraph,
September 14, 2009



And we will demand the extension of further devolved powers to Northern Ireland including:

- Fiscal discretion and other economic levers.
- Broadcasting, telecommunications and the internet.
- Aviation.
- Foreshore and seabed resource rights.
- National insurance and minimum wage.
- Energy and minerals resources.
- Drug Policy.
- Local elections.
- Lottery spending.
- Consumer protection.

“SDLP plans for a multi-million financial boost to the budget shows how devolution could be used constructively”

John Simpson, Belfast Telegraph,
April 8, 2009



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

By taking our seats in Westminster the SDLP has been consistently international, as well as local, in outlook throughout our parliamentary term.

Our MPs have taken a strong stance on issues including the ill-advised government counter-terrorism measures; human trafficking; and cluster munitions, which gained cross-party support and was quickly followed by a decision by the British government to support a ban on cluster bombs.

The next Westminster Parliament coincides with the lead up to the 2015 deadline for achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

We will continue to promote fair trade and press the next British Government to reintroduce the International Development Bill as a priority in the next Parliament, ensuring an increase in aid to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2013 to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

In this time of economic crisis, many governments are reviewing their external aid budgets. This can only spell disaster for

those countries whose people's prospects rely on foreign aid.

Building up the economies of developing countries is not just a moral imperative, it is in all our interests, as the EU has proven by boosting all the economies of the Member States, including our own.

Consistent with our fight for human rights and equality at home, the SDLP will continue to highlight human rights abuses abroad as we have in this parliament, using our Westminster platform to highlight the violence in Darfur, ongoing human rights abuses in Iran and the suffering in Gaza.



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

Printed by:
GPS Colour Graphics Ltd
Alexander Road
Belfast BT6 9HP

For further information:
Tel: 02890 247700
Emai: info@sdlp.ie
Web: www.sdlp.ie

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