
Social Democratic and Labour Party

Uniting People, Building Prosperity

The SDLP Programme for Government 2011



April 2011



SDLP Programme for Government 2011

Contents

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|-----------|
| Building Prosperity | Creating Jobs, Growing the Economy | 4 |
| | Investing in Young People | 6 |
| | Delivering Better Government | 8 |
| <hr/> | | |
| Uniting People | Transforming Society | 10 |
| | Leading the New Politics | 12 |
| | Becoming One People, One Island | 14 |

SDLP Programme for Government 2011

Uniting People, Building Prosperity

SDLP ideas will build a North which is attractive to business; takes care of the sick; respects its older citizens; is a great place to work and to raise a family.

Message from Party Leader Margaret Ritchie MP

We have now had four years of devolution. And while it's good to have completed a full term, we have yet to show people the real benefits of having our own Government.

So this election is all the more crucial. It must produce an Assembly and an Executive that will start to deliver on the promise of devolution.

It must deliver in particular, on jobs and the economy, and it must deliver on uniting people.

The SDLP is proud of its track record of delivery. We appoint competent ministers and we use the power you entrust to us to make a real difference for you, your family and our entire community. We are absolutely committed to making the next Assembly deliver on uniting people and building prosperity.

Against a background of economic hardship and a budget imposing severe cuts to vital public services, your area will benefit from a strong SDLP team in the Assembly. And strong SDLP teams in Council chambers too.

We pledge to protect frontline services and fight for every job.

With your help we can return a first-class line-up of representatives with the ideal blend of experience, energy and imagination.

We will not accept devolution that is little different from Direct Rule.

We are brimming with ideas to move society forward, to build a stronger economy and to make Government work properly.

The SDLP will lead the new politics and transform the North.

Devolution could do much better.

The SDLP will make it work for you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Ritchie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

1

Creating Jobs, Growing the Economy

The SDLP prosperity plan will rebalance the economy, lower corporation tax and create thousands of jobs, through foreign investment as well as in tourism, construction and the green economy. Our proposals to raise and save £4billion allow more funds for school and roads building – planning infrastructure on an all-island basis.

Rebalancing the Economy

The Northern Ireland economy is unbalanced; the private sector is too small. Continuation of existing policies will not provide the momentum required to grow the private sector economy in the long term. We are committed to:

- Implementing the SDLP budget plan to raise £4billion.
- An all-island rate of Corporation tax at 12.5%.
- Seeking other tax varying powers.
- Reprioritising capital expenditure to focus on jobs.
- Creating a local investment Bond to raise money for school building.
- Providing support and incentives for the construction industry.
- Expanding Local Government borrowing to fund community building projects.
- Modernising our energy provision through accelerated investment in renewables and the green economy.
- Fundamentally reforming the planning system.
- Mutualising Northern Ireland water to finance new infrastructure.
- Pursuing the mutualisation or disposal of other assets.
- Creating an infrastructure bank to finance large public building projects.

Our full proposals: "Partnership and Economic Recovery" are available at www.sdlp.ie.

Building on Strong Business Sectors

With 32,000 more jobseekers than in 2008 job creation is essential. The SDLP jobs plan highlights opportunities for short-term investment in Northern Ireland's core business sectors to create 16,000 jobs in 3 years* by:

- Investing in the flourishing agri-food sector creating 3,300 direct and supply chain jobs.
- Beginning an ambitious process of doubling our tourism revenue as the global economy improves, creating 2,200 jobs.
- Ensuring the continued growth of our ICT sector creating 2,000 jobs.
- Properly financing the Green New Deal to create 7,000 jobs.
- Diverting capital spend to the shovel ready building projects which create most jobs – including social housing – to create 1,500 jobs.

“Creating Jobs, Building Prosperity” our proposals for growing the economy and for medium and long term creation of over 42,000 jobs in ICT, creative industries, financial services and health technologies will be published soon.

*SDLP job creation figures are based on research by Oxford Economics and the University of Ulster.

Improving North-South Economic Cooperation

With the challenging economic times and a new Government in the South there is no better time to progress North-South development and save money through new economies of scale, reduced duplication and increased specialisation. North-South interaction must:

- Progress ambition for an “Innovation Island” through implementation at NSMC level.
- Encourage Research and Development investment and better cooperation to exploit the potential of Framework 7.
- Work for the application of the “Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy” and the “National Development Plan”.
- Examine North-South cooperation in infrastructure development and financing and establish an all-island strategic investment bank.
- Develop all-island renewable energy and energy security of supply strategies.
- Unify the gas transmission network and introduce a single gas market.
- Implement a completely integrated and managed energy market with a single independent regulator.
- Create an independent all-island environment agency.

Read our full proposals in: “North-South, no going back” at www.sdip.ie.

2

Investing in Young People

By investing in young people, their education and development, our society and economy will grow. We will help young people in schools, into training and into work in future growth industries. We will boost student finance, support teachers, and end the chaos in the education system.

Investing in Schools and Teachers

The debate on the future of education must be extended beyond the current damaging stalemate. Investing in our teachers, enhancing facilities and promoting sharing in education are essential to move forward. We must:

- Promote shared education mindful of the consequential cost savings and societal benefits.
- Tackle surplus school places through needs-based development of provision.
- Enhance teacher training and continued professional development.
- Establish the Education and Skills Authority and its cost saving benefits.
- Accelerate school build and maintenance projects.
- Ensure provision of rural schooling through shared faith schools.

Increasing Access to Training and University

If we are to provide opportunities for our young people in today's global marketplace we must ensure we provide better access to high quality training and third level education. The SDLP will:

- Defend students from unjustified fee rises.
- Directly focus on attainment in science, technology, engineering and maths to provide young people and our economy with the necessary skills to excel.
- Improve efficiency in our universities.
- Focus Department of Employment and Learning training programmes on the real needs of our economy.
- Defend the Educational Maintenance Allowance from cuts.
- Introduce a graduate apprenticeship intern scheme.

Ending how the System Fails Many Children

In the past four years while the debate on academic selection has raged, the education system has continued to fail many of our most vulnerable young people. Beginning at early years, when many children begin to fall behind, to the age of 16 when many of our school leavers graduate from the system with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills the current system is failing our young people. We will change the education system to:

- Tackle the ongoing literacy and numeracy crisis.
- Reassess education investment to remove the high levels of inequality.
- Invest in early years to prevent children falling behind at an early age.
- Expand the extended schools programme.
- Introduce customised programmes to engage disaffected youth.
- Improve careers advice services.
- Provide extra targeted support for children not in education, employment or training.
- Provide better support for newcomer children.
- Bring forward a policy for children with special educational needs as a matter of urgency.
- Provide additional support for vulnerable children at points of transfer in the education system.
- Assess options to alter the transfer age to 14, which is in line with the new curriculum and is a better age at which to exercise pupil and parental choice.

Read our proposals for tackling the academic selection crisis and reframing the education debate in our document “Putting Children First” at www.sdlp.ie.

3

Delivering Better Government

The SDLP will lead a united front of business, unions and Government to create a better public service and break political stalemates. We have a strong record of delivery in Government and the Assembly. Although we will drive change, we rule out compulsory redundancy.

Driving Radical Public Sector Reform

Public sector reform is a vital requirement in tackling the budgetary challenge. We can achieve better, not worse, public services and create a path toward long term economic and social success. Reform should:

- Include trade unions, business leaders, the voluntary sector and politicians in a “social partnership” to drive forward change.
- Be politically led to ensure success.
- Give public servants more freedom by developing a “portfolio” approach in the assessment of success and failure – allowing some failures provided overall success is achieved.
- Redesign the planning system.
- Develop “Challenge Funds” – to encourage competition and entrepreneurship, including in public service provision.
- Rule out compulsory redundancy in the public sector.

Read our full proposals in chapter 7 of "Partnership and Economic Recovery" at www.sdlp.ie.

Overcoming Executive Stalemates

The outgoing Executive has presided over far too many failures. The SDLP will work to:

- Fundamentally rewrite the “Strategy for Cohesion Sharing and Integration”.
- Find solutions to the disputes over parading, victims issues and dealing with the past.
- Complete the Review of Public Administration.

-
- Mutualise NI water.
 - Implement the Education Skills Authority.
 - Develop an alternative to the failed Workplace 2010 project.
 - Set up an interdepartmental taskforce for multi-agency crisis response.
 - Reframe the debate and develop a solution to the academic selection stalemate.
 - Enable the North-South bodies to enhance financial benefits of cooperation.
 - Develop the Maze site and other OFMDFM regeneration sites.
 - Implement the Bain report into the relocation of public sector jobs.
 - Re-establish credibility around agriculture and EU funding administration.
 - Establish a strong service level agreement between Councils and DRD for road and pavement gritting.

To read more SDLP proposals on overcoming Executive logjams read “Your Future Our Priority, Making Devolution Work” on the Party website.

Appointing Competent Ministers

The SDLP will continue to demonstrate our competence in Government. Both Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood have shown leadership in protecting vulnerable people and in exceeding targets for social house building, even following a crash in the housing market.

Not only will we continue to demonstrate competence in the Executive but we will continue our high level of performance in the Assembly chamber and in committees.

At committee SDLP members have led investigations into climate change, advancing powers for credit unions, addressing the problems of children not in education, employment or training and uncovered gross mismanagement at NI Water.

Our MLAs will continue to strive to make individual achievements like that of Dominic Bradley who, despite opposition, brought forward a piece of private members legislation which provided extra protections for people with autism – a piece of legislation which is one of the Assembly’s greatest achievements.

4

Transforming Society

The SDLP will build a shared North where a united people live, learn and work together in safer communities with less crime. We will protect frontline services, particularly in health and stand up for the most vulnerable in society. We will champion civil liberties and minority rights.

Ending Segregation in Housing and Education

The North will not develop without the promotion of a shared society. The SDLP is not satisfied with “benign apartheid” in Northern Ireland. This would have catastrophic consequences for our future development, relations on this island and relations with Britain. The SDLP will:

- Engage all sections of the community in a debate about what a shared future means.
- Help the public and politicians recognise the huge structural and organisational change which lies ahead if we are to implement an effective good relations strategy.
- Develop a robust strategy for a shared future which will include firm public policy proposals outlining how good relations will be delivered through all Government services especially:
 - Housing
 - Youth Services
 - Schools
 - Workplaces
 - Transport
 - Tackling social disadvantage
- Begin to eliminate the “cost of division” through these public policy changes which will eradicate the duplication and waste resulting from segregation and segregated services.

For more on the SDLP vision of a shared society read our response to the OFMDFM Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, available at www.sdlp.ie.

Protecting Frontline Health Services

The health service is facing a funding crisis. Focused reform is required to stop deprecation of service provision. The SDLP will:

- Provide honesty and openness on health reform where it's needed.
- Prioritise health promotion and the associated long term health and cost saving benefits.
- Ensure the all-island delivery of health provision to ensure best service in border areas and cost saving.
- Reduce management and administrative costs.
- Continue to develop apace ongoing North-South commitment to cross-border health projects and enhance further collaboration to provide better services and cost savings from:
 - Procurement of drugs and equipment.
 - Cooperation on public health and health promotion.
 - Specialised services where greater population mass is required.
 - Access to services in rural/border areas, including the reduction in duplication of provision and benefits for emergency response.
 - Common standards to promote quality and safety of healthcare.
 - Long term planning on location of hospital infrastructure.

The SDLP manifesto will outline in detail our priorities for patient care which will be enabled by health service reform.

Protecting the Vulnerable

The SDLP have an unwavering commitment to shield vulnerable households from the worst impacts of the downturn and budget cuts. We will prioritise:

- Housing, “Supporting People”, tackling fuel poverty and child poverty.
- Funding in disadvantaged communities – Neighbourhood Renewal.
- Programmes aimed at community regeneration and rural poverty.
- Support for voluntary and community sector administered programmes.
- Assistance for those negatively affected by welfare reform.
- Protection for and empowerment of the Community Relations Council.
- Tackling severe child poverty.
- A revision of the Racial Equality Strategy.
- A full enquiry into historical institutional child abuse.
- A single Equality Bill & Bill of Rights.

5

Leading the New Politics

The SDLP stands for partnership and open Government, not carve-up. We will deliver council reform and spread Government jobs across the North. The SDLP plan will shrink bureaucracy, have less politicians and fewer Government departments which better suit public needs.

Real Partnership

New Politics will only come about with real partnership. It is not the system of Government which has failed, instead the problems emanate from the Executive's largest parties preference for carve-up over cooperation. The SDLP desire:

- Truly collective and evidence based Executive decision making on all major policy priorities.
- The introduction of the proposals from the Executive working group, established at Hillsborough and chaired by Margaret Ritchie and Sir Reg Empey, to reform Executive working.
- That D'hondt is run for all Ministries after the Assembly election; this will avoid a crisis around the Justice Ministry post in 2012.

Openness, Transparency and Accountability

The opportunity now exists to change the way we do politics in the North. But first the whole process of decision-making must be more transparent and consultation more meaningful. The SDLP will support political reform in order that:

- Adequate time is allowed for genuine engagement and consultation on all legislation.
- Parties agree a system of Ministerial accountability whereby Ministers who fail can be replaced.
- The Budget is changed to highlight specific spending on frontline services.
- Each Minister is required to make a statement to the Assembly on their own Budget proposals.

- All Ministers are asked to open their spending plans to all their Executive colleagues for collective scrutiny.
- An Assembly Budget Review Group is established to interrogate the cost of Government in a similar vein to the Executive Budget Review Group.

Downsizing Stormont

Northern Ireland, for its size is over governed. This was a fundamental reality underpinning the Review of Public Administration (RPA). Although the RPA failed because the DUP and Sinn Fein could not agree their administrative carve-up, the central idea of streamlining Government and transferring functions to a reformed Local Government was sound. In the next mandate the SDLP will press for radical reform of Government, including:

- Cutting the number of MLAs from 108 to 96 by the time of the next election with a further reduction negotiable after 2015.
- Reassessing the number of Stormont Departments and Ministers.
- Restructuring departments to better suit the needs of the public. This restructuring should include:
 - A Department of the Economy
 - A Department of Energy and Sustainability
 - A Department of Learning
 - A Department of Communities, Local Government and Housing
- Abolishing the two Junior Ministerial positions with immediate effect.
- Implementing RPA with an 11 Council model with greatly enhanced functions.

6

Becoming One People, One Island

The SDLP is proudly Northern, proudly Irish, and proudly European. We plan to remove the discord from the anniversaries in this decade, redefine our constitution and our island. Through agreement we can unite people in a new Ireland.

Celebrating Our Shared Identity

There is great opportunity to develop the shared narratives of the people of the North instead of focusing on division. This will be the decade of anniversaries and therefore a time to either come together looking to the future or to divide again by harking back to historical grievances. We must:

- Build on positive achievements like the Derry City of Culture.
- Use the positive example of the Titanic centenary commemorations to develop the social and cultural opportunities of our shared history, notably Saint Patrick.
- Ensure resources are set aside to develop the tourist potential of our shared history and scope the potential of a homecoming year for the North's diaspora.
- Encourage all political parties on the Island to take a unified approach to commemorations in this decade of anniversaries.
- Welcome and embrace our new citizens into our shared identity.

Promoting a new Constitutional Convention

The new Irish Government are committed to a constitutional convention. The SDLP wish to:

- Ensure that the people of the North are able to participate and their needs are accounted for.
- Guarantee that the people of the North be given voting rights in Presidential elections.
- Provide for Northern representation in the body which replaces the Seanad Éireann.
- Push for an All-Island Charter of Rights.

Envisaging Unity

Uniquely among parties in the North, we are clear on the structures of a united Ireland and the strategy for achieving it. In the united Ireland that the SDLP seeks:

- The Assembly would continue, as a regional parliament of a united Ireland with all its cross-community protections.
- The Executive would be kept, bringing together all political parties.
- All the Good Friday Agreement's equality and human rights protections, including the Bill of Rights, would still be guaranteed.
- The right to identify oneself as British or Irish, or both, and hold British or Irish passports would endure.
- East/West cooperation would continue. In particular, just as the Irish Government has a say in the North now, the British Government would have a say in the North in a united Ireland.

To find out more about the SDLP vision for Unity read our Unity document at www.sdlp.ie.



Published and printed by SDLP Headquarters, 121 Ormeau Road, BT7 1SH