



Social Democratic and Labour Party

**SDLP WESTMINSTER
ELECTION MANIFESTO**

**TAKING OUR SEATS
TAKING A STAND**



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TAKE ON THE TORIES

COLUM EASTWOOD

SDLP LEADER

This is an election that no one wanted. After going to the polls in March and seeing no government there is a toxic mix of anger and electoral fatigue. Is it any wonder?

People are being asked to go to the ballot box for the fifth time in two years. This disorientation and dysfunction in politics stems from one place. The Brexit referendum result was a moment of deep divergence that is still working its way across these islands.

Therefore, whilst many things remain uncertain, the politics of this election is clear: ***This is a Brexit election called by Theresa May to enforce a future to which we haven't given our consent.***

It now appears inevitable that Theresa May's momentum will carry her back to Downing Street. It is not inevitable that the North sends back a majority of MPs to Westminster who will play along with the Tory vision of a hard Brexit and a hard border.

Every vote for the SDLP is a vote representing the future which we voted for last June. We are a party with Europe and the Good Friday Agreement at our core: We are the party best able and best connected to defend the interests of the Agreement, of our businesses and people across the North. ***Those who placed a Remain vote in ballot boxes last June should carry through with that decision and vote SDLP this June.***

People should also know that because of their inability to form an Executive, the DUP and Sinn Féin are going into this election offering our people permanent Tory governance.

Brexit's risks to our interests and rights makes it imperative that we restore the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

The political maths of this election are simple. A DUP seat will only add to Tory numbers: A Sinn Féin seat won't even get counted. With a devolution vacuum, that means people like Jeremy Hunt, Iain Duncan Smith and others gradually taking over our public services. We won't stand for that. The SDLP will stand against that every day.

Only the SDLP can fight a hard Brexit and a hard border.

Only the SDLP can stand with a progressive alliance of MPs at Westminster to take the fight to Theresa May.

Only the SDLP can take on the Tories.

On June 8th, take a stand with us and vote SDLP.

**Colum Eastwood MLA
SDLP Leader**



Theresa May wants a strong hand for a hard Brexit and a free hand for new cuts to benefits, tax credits and pensions. Not content with Brexit's threat to the Good Friday Agreement, she is also planning both to overturn the Human Rights Act and to water down employment rights and environmental standards, which have been guaranteed in the European Union.

The SDLP will expose and oppose her at every turn.

There are many key policy areas that are still dealt with at Westminster and Westminster often sets a precedent for many devolved areas, not least in welfare.

SDLP MPs take their seats at Westminster to make a stand, ensuring that the North's views and values are not sidelined on key issues. DUP MPs will count for Theresa May and Sinn Féin MPs won't count against her.

Some parties are happy to fall in line with the Tories and not make the case for the North's specific circumstances and needs. Others may not comprehend the importance of MPs taking their seats on the basis that they can write letters and seek meetings with Ministers. The SDLP can do all of that and more. Every time the Prime Minister or a Government Minister stands up at the despatch box, they have to look an SDLP MP in the eye and be held to account on the issues that matter to people here.

Mark Durkan has been the only pro-EU voice for the North on the Select Committee for Exiting the European Union. As a result he was able to question the Secretary of State for Brexit, David Davis, directly on the North's route back into the EU. It was this forensic questioning by Mark Durkan that forced the British Government to concede for the first time that Northern Ireland has the option of rejoining the EU via a united Ireland. Mark has argued this point since the



TAKE ON THE TORIES

TAKING A SEAT MAKING A STAND

24th June 2016 and the recognition by the EU27 vindicates our work on this.

As the only Nationalist on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Alasdair McDonnell has been a strong advocate on rights, equality, legacy and the past during inquiries that would otherwise be dominated by Tory and DUP MPs. From the inquiry into the future of the land border following Brexit to the 'On the Runs', Alasdair has ensured that a DUP/Tory axis cannot disregard or smear the views of others in the North.

Margaret Ritchie is one of the longest serving members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee and is the only pro-EU voice for our farmers and fishermen in the North. She brings key decision makers to the North to hear the issues and concerns of our agricultural and fishing industries first hand and ensures that the pressing issues for Northern Ireland

agriculture and fisheries are addressed by the Committee, not least the challenges that Brexit poses for these key sectors.

The SDLP is the only party from the North that voted against Brexit at every opportunity, and now stands up to ensure that the concerns of Northern Ireland - its unique status and circumstances - are heard and understood.

From the House of Commons chamber to Committees to All-Party Parliamentary Groups, SDLP MPs will ensure that the range of issues and concerns that matter to our constituents are front and centre at Westminster.



SHAPING OUR FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EU

The SDLP is proudly pro-European and was the only party in Northern Ireland to officially register to campaign for a vote to Remain. The SDLP is also the only local party to vote consistently against the UK's withdrawal from the European Union at Westminster. We have defended the principle of consent at the heart of the North's political settlement and ensured Northern Ireland's vote in favour of remaining in the EU has been heard loudly and clearly by the UK Government. We were the first party to call for an All-Island Civic Dialogue.

It was through his membership of the Select Committee for Exiting the European Union that Mark Durkan made the UK Government concede, for the first time ever, that the North had a route back into the EU through the consent precepts and principles of the Good Friday Agreement. Margaret Ritchie defends and champions our agri-food sector on the EFRA Committee and is working to ensure that the environmental standards and frameworks guaranteed by the EU are not diluted. As a proud pro-European voice on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Alasdair McDonnell has emphasised the need to maintain the single all-island electricity market and has argued for all-island single markets for other key sectors to mitigate the impact exiting the EU will have on the economy.

In Select Committees, in Westminster debates, in the Northern Ireland Assembly, at the Joint Committee of the

Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and at the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly - the SDLP has been putting forward the creative and innovative ideas and solutions needed to address Brexit.

We cannot and will not simply tailgate London. The Good Friday Agreement clearly makes Northern Ireland distinct from the rest of the UK in a number of critical respects, including:

- Strand Two gives us the capacity and platform for co-ordination, co-operation and joint implementation with another member state on a range of sectors;
- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK that can rejoin the EU without recourse to Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty;
- People in the North are entitled, by birth, to be citizens of an EU member state post Brexit and are entitled to European citizenship; and
- The North-South Ministerial Council enables us to be represented at relevant EU meetings post Brexit.

As such, we should be treated distinctively in any future UK-EU agreement.

An Taoiseach agreed with these points put to him by the SDLP. We welcome the Irish Government's and the entire EU27's recognition of our special circumstances.

The SDLP is asking the difficult questions on and providing the right answers to Brexit.

EU SPECIAL STATUS

The SDLP was the first party to call for bespoke status for Northern Ireland that would maintain the Common Travel Area (CTA) and allow us to maintain access to the EU and the many benefits it offers us by treating the island of Ireland as part of the European Economic Area.

We will continue to fight for the North to retain access to the free movement of people, goods, services and capital and for an all-island market for suitable sectors such as electricity; securing human rights and protections derived from EU legislation; and all-island representation in the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and other European institutions to enable a direct dialogue between them and Northern Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement gives us the building blocks for customised arrangements. The Agreement lists twelve areas of North-South co-operation but we are not confined to these areas, as evidenced by InterTrade Ireland, which itself offers worthwhile scope to deal with the challenges of Brexit. The EU27 has indicated that it will respect existing bilateral agreements between the UK and Ireland and will seek flexible and creative solutions.

The SDLP has been at the fore of creating our own flexible and creative solutions, using the Agreement and the EU27's position as the prospectus for protecting border regions and key sectors that will be particularly challenged by Brexit.

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Common UK and Irish membership of the European Union was a given in the Good Friday Agreement, voted overwhelmingly in a double referendum by the people of Ireland, North and South. The Tories are in total denial about the implications that the Brexit process has for the Good Friday Agreement and the fissures it drives into its key and carefully compacted layers of understanding. The SDLP will vehemently defend the Agreement and protect its constitutional, institutional and rights provisions in the unfolding landscape.

Yet the SDLP also recognises that the Good Friday Agreement offers the machinery to address many of the questions and issues

Brexit poses for the whole of the island. Full optimisation of the Agreement is imperative to empower Northern Ireland to have the strongest and clearest input into our own political, economic, social and environmental interests.

Strand Two of the Agreement provides a framework for all-island co-operation and North-South joint implementation in key policy areas. This originally operated in the context of common EU membership and through EU programmes. Strand Two not only demands differential treatment for the North; it can be part of accommodating it. Part of the North-South Ministerial Council's remit is to consider EU matters: the scope of this must be urgently reviewed and expanded to enhance Northern Ireland's views at relevant EU meetings. We must also now review the scope and relevance of the Strand Two bodies to secure agreement on new areas of co-operation and implementation. Regardless of the overall UK position on the Single Market and Customs Union, Strand Two of the Agreement can and must be used to enable North-South parity and equivalence and allow us an all-island single market for specific sectors.

Strand Three deals with the East-West axis between the Irish and UK Governments. The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIC) could provide a forum for non-devolved matters that Irish and UK Governments have in common. BIIC can also include devolved ministers where matters under discussion touch on areas of devolved interests. In its remit to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands, BIIC could offer a more worthwhile channel of engagement than the experience of the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU negotiations).

"it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland"

The Good Friday Agreement



NORTHERN IRELAND'S ROUTE BACK INTO THE EU

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK that can rejoin the EU without going through Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty.

Through the consent precept of the Good Friday Agreement, people in the North have the option to re-join the EU by voting in a referendum for a united Ireland. Any doubt or ambiguity around this would act as "an external impediment" to the right of the people of Ireland, North and South, to self-determination.

The British Government's first acknowledgement of this was as a direct result of action taken by the SDLP in Westminster, through Mark Durkan's questioning of the Secretary of State, David Davis in an evidence session of the Select Committee for Exiting the EU.

In a climate where Whitehall is clearly using Article 49 requirements against the Scottish Government's position and are citing the 'Barroso Doctrine' in unqualified terms with allusions to potential sensitivities of several EU member states, it is essential that the Good Friday Agreement's promise on consent is fully articulated and stipulated in any new treaty, agreement or relevant framework between the UK and the EU.

The position taken by the Irish Government and the entire EU27 vindicates the SDLP's work on this. We will continue to press the UK Government also to commit to this position.

THE BORDER: BORDERISM AND FUTURE BORDERS

The SDLP has been clear that any hardening of the border would spell disaster for our businesses and communities, not least for our border constituencies with thousands of daily cross-border workers, farms that straddle the border and businesses that rely on trade with the South.

The British Government and pro-Brexit parties have been perpetuating myths and half-truths about the CTA. We have never before been in a situation in which one member of the CTA is part of the EU and another is not. The CTA cannot be taken for granted and its maintenance must be an explicit commitment for the Government in its negotiations.

Moreover, there are additional serious implications for the North than just the possible profile of the border in future. The Prime Minister has been careful to say that she wants the border to be as frictionless and seamless as possible and that there would be "no return to the hard borders of the past", but there has been no full commitment that there will be no possible borders in the future.

The SDLP will be vigilant to incipient borderism, exposing and opposing any hardening borders - both figuratively and physically - across the island.



EU FUNDING AND NEW NORTH-SOUTH STRUCTURAL FUND

EU funding has been transformative for Northern Ireland and for North-South relations. The SDLP has argued for the continuation of EU funding. This could be administered and managed by the North-South Ministerial Council and could also provide continuity of Interreg funding on an East-West basis that has also involved Scotland and Wales.

The SDLP has already raised with both Governments, at Westminster and in the Good Friday Agreement Committee, the possibility of using the 'Loans to Ireland' repayments to cover some of the costs Brexit will have for administrations North and South. They could also be used to channel monies into cross-border development and in border areas and sectors that will be particularly challenged by Brexit. Moreover, if there is to be continuity of some EU funding, some of the £3.2bn (£3.835bn) and interest, already being paid twice a year, could be used to cover part of the match funding typically required under EU rules.

The SDLP has also proposed channelling a significant proportion of this money into the creation of a new North-South Structural Fund, an all island version of the European Structural and Investment Funds. This could be a conduit for future funding to projects that would stimulate the economy and help to address regional imbalances such as the Narrow Water Bridge, City Deals and Derry-Dublin-Letterkenny infrastructure.

ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

EU legislation and investment have provided important environmental protections through cross-border environmental co-operation. Brexit cannot undermine these environmental standards.

The Island of Ireland is a single biogeographic unit with co-ordinated cross-border action required on climate change, air quality, freshwater and marine habitats and energy supply. Maintaining the North's access to funds such as the EU INTERREG VA Programme 2014-2020 and upholding EU standards is necessary for such co-ordinated action.

EU STANDARDS ON WORKERS' RIGHTS

Securing the freedom to move, trade and work across the border is central to the upcoming negotiations. However this freedom of movement is not enough.

Those working on a cross border basis must also be protected by the principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment. More specifically the protections which are currently in place for the equality of treatment in respect of any conditions of employment and work as regards pay, dismissal, reinstatement or re-employment.



THE GREAT REPEAL BILL AND DEVOLUTION, RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS BILL

It was the SDLP that recognised the implications that the Great Repeal Bill will have for our devolved institutions. Rather than repeal, the Bill will convert EU legislation into national law the moment that the UK formally exits the EU. The key question thereafter is who controls the delete button.

The SDLP is not prepared for devolved competencies to be dealt with at Westminster and will press to ensure there can be no interference in such matters at Westminster before they are sent to the devolved institutions. We cannot find ourselves in a situation whereby key devolved areas, such as employment rights, are tampered with by the UK Government before people in the North have their say through the Executive and Assembly.

The SDLP proposes tabling a Devolution, Rights and Environmental Standards Bill in the Assembly to allow us to avoid awaiting Legislative Consent Motions framed and timed by the British Government. Such a Bill would enable the Assembly to establish principled foundations for a rights benchmarked devolved framework informed by the Good Friday Agreement.

This Bill will provide for a 'non-retrogression clause' in respect of any applicable rights or environmental protection standards which will be under the Assembly's devolved

competence and no longer subject directly to EU law. In areas such as employment rights, we want to prevent dilution before devolution.

The Bill will also ensure that any future proposals by Ministers, departments or other devolved authorities to depart from relevant rights or standards as inherited from EU law should be subject to Assembly approval. A proactive approach is vital to prevent the Great Repeal Bill and its secondary legislation from weakening current rights and standards.

RACISM AND IMMIGRATION

The SDLP opposes racism and xenophobia in all its forms and is concerned by reports of increased hate crime following the vote to leave the European Union. We believe that a shared future in Northern Ireland will only be achieved with the full inclusion of the traditional communities and newer communities who have come to make a new home. The SDLP believes that no EU National should fear that Brexit will affect their right to reside or alter any of their existing rights: they must not be used as a bargaining chip in forthcoming negotiations.

Immigration has enriched the North. It has also enriched the lives of people in Northern Ireland who can live and work in other European countries. Immigration remains a reserved matter and it is vital that the UK Government is made to understand that people in the North have a birth right to be citizens of Ireland and thus European citizens and should retain all of the access and benefits this brings.





TAKE ON THE TORIES

MAKING NORTHERN IRELAND WORK

NORTHERN IRELAND INSTITUTIONS

The SDLP is very clear that a failure to get the institutions working is letting our people down. Devolution exists to improve the lives of everyone in our society by enabling us to design policy and public services in a way that is right for Northern Ireland. The SDLP has engaged and will continue to engage with both Governments and other parties to get the Assembly and the Executive restored.

This Westminster election ironically highlights the absence of our own working institutions. SDLP MLAs are ready and waiting to get back into the Assembly representing their constituents. Politicians from the North need to come together and work for people not parties.

The SDLP has submitted a number of papers to the current talks aimed at mending and enhancing our institutions while also enhancing devolution. We must move forward on issues like the Petition of Concern - which has never operated as it was originally intended in the Good Friday Agreement - and budget transparency.

The Tories are content to strip Stormont of more and more of our devolved powers: we witnessed their laissez-faire approach to the Assembly when they connived with Sinn Féin and the DUP to undermine the Assembly by legislating for welfare cuts at Westminster. They fail to recognise that the political settlement in the North rests not on the concession of devolution from Westminster but on the express consent of people in Ireland, North and South, when

they voted for the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

There are impending negotiations with the EU: negotiations that will shape the future of the North and of this whole island for many years to come. It is essential that the North has its own representatives to make their case. The SDLP is not prepared to leave this to London, Dublin or Brussels.

SDLP MPs will be there at Westminster making the case for our institutions and for the people of the North.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The SDLP is firmly committed to the highest standards of transparency and accountability in public life. Elected and appointed public figures are duty bound to be open and honest with the public. Standards of transparency and accountability, or rather the lack of, in the Northern Ireland Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly were laid bare by the Renewable Heat Incentive scandal. The Assembly must be restored to a chamber of accountability and transparency.

Budget transparency has steadily eroded since the days that the SDLP held the Finance Ministry. Budget transparency should not be a goal: it should be a prerequisite. Budget transparency is about more than procedural reform: it is about ensuring that the public can easily and clearly see where and how their money is spent. The SDLP wants to see the Northern Ireland Executive adhering to the



Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Best Practices for Budget Transparency.

WELFARE AND PENSIONS

It was SDLP MPs who stood up for our welfare system in Westminster when the DUP and Sinn Féin handed our devolved welfare powers over to the Tories.

SDLP MPs were the only MPs from Northern Ireland to vote against the Welfare Cap in 2014, recognising that it was not a neutral budgetary tool. Political circumstances forced the Tories to be relaxed about its adherence but the return of the Welfare Cap as a working weapon of Government cuts in this Parliament is likely. The SDLP were and will remain vigilant to a new adherence to the Cap and possible regional application.

The Tories committed only to no further cuts to social security benefits and tax credits in the current Parliament: they have made no such commitment for the Parliament that will be formed after June 8th. The restriction of tax credits to the first two children and the requirement that women who have had a third child as a result of rape to provide evidence, is a portent of the Tories' insidious plans for our welfare system.

The SDLP will continue to expose and oppose cuts to benefits, tax credits and pensions in the Tories' plans to cut incomes of hard-pressed families.

We will also continue to pressure the Work and Pensions Secretary to end the cruel sanctions regime and to improve work assessments, which are often humiliating and unnecessarily stressful, not least for people with chronic conditions. Not only are these work assessments distressing for individuals with chronic conditions: they are more often than not an unnecessary costly administrative burden.

The SDLP will also continue to support the campaign of Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI). Women already experience pension inequality as a result of the gender pay gap and due to the fact that they are more likely to have employment gaps and/or to work part-time because of caring responsibilities. The haphazard approach to the equalisation of the state pension age has exacerbated this inequality. These women cannot be casualties on the road to state pension age equalisation and the SDLP will continue to fight for their right to full transitional protections.



POVERTY, WORKERS' RIGHTS AND LIVING STANDARDS

The rise in the cost of living and the stagnation of wages under the Tories has affected thousands of hardpressed families. It is unacceptable that one in four people living in the North is living in poverty; that over 125,000 of our pensioners live on low incomes, with over 18,000 of them forced to spend their senior and final years living in severe poverty; and that over 100,000 children are living in relative poverty.

The SDLP opposed the Tories' attack on the Child Poverty Act and successfully campaigned for the income-related measures of child poverty to continue to be collected and recorded by the British Government to ensure that the Tories could not obscure the levels of poverty under their rule.

The rise of in-work poverty is a cause for deep concern. The SDLP is also concerned about the practice of zero-hour contracts and the growing experience of precarious, variable and capricious employment. We have always supported efforts to curtail such practices.

Workers and employees need job security and cannot be exploited.

The need for robust legislation is more pressing if the UK Government intends to dilute employment rights guaranteed by the EU.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional problem that requires an ambitious, standalone Anti-Poverty Strategy which also addresses social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need.

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.

The SDLP has argued that savings from the voluntary exit scheme should be used for restorative pay measures, rather than to pay for a cut in corporation tax, for people in the public sector who have lost out due to a continued pay freeze and some of the legacy pay inequities.



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 the North as well as comprehensive legislation, to include coercive behaviour.

SDLP MPs supported the successful Istanbul Convention Bill on preventing and combating violence against women and girls. We will support a Domestic Violence Bill at Westminster as we have supported legislation in the Assembly.

Robust and compatible legislation on domestic abuse and violence is needed at a UK-wide and devolved level.

We support the pathfinding 'One Safe Place' project, the first Family Justice Centre to be opened in Northern Ireland and pioneered by Foyle Women's Aid with positive support from key agencies. As well as continuing to encourage all the relevant devolved authorities to commit to this model, we will also continue to identify other UK-wide funding support such as 'Tampon Tax' for such services.

LGBT+ RIGHTS AND MARRIAGE EQUALITY

The SDLP strongly supports LGBT+ rights. Not only did SDLP Leader Colum Eastwood bring forward the first marriage equality

motion to receive a majority in the Northern Ireland Assembly, we have also tabled a Bill to legislate for marriage equality.

We use our voices and our votes at Westminster to speak up for these rights at home and in other countries where they are denied.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

The SDLP will use our position in Westminster to support positive housing decisions and priority spending on social housing and new build programmes, including budgetary lines which in turn factor into the Barnett formula allocation for Northern Ireland.

Access to a good quality, secure and affordable home is a fundamental right. It is critical if communities are to flourish.

The SDLP believes that at least 3,000 new social homes are needed each year to meet demand. These new homes must be targeted at the areas with greatest social need.

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.



HEALTH

Health is a devolved matter but the budget that determines Barnett consequentials is set at Westminster so it is essential for Northern Ireland MPs to be there to influence these budgetary decisions and policy precedents. At Westminster the SDLP will continue to oppose any proposals to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. The SDLP is committed to protecting and providing a modern, comprehensive Health and Social Care system that delivers universal, high quality and safe services that are free at the point of delivery.

We welcome the publication of the Transformation Report which contains some extremely sensible and necessary proposals. Details and targets must be added to this timeframe as soon as possible. These reforms must include a fair and well-deserved consolidated pay-rise for our nursing and other medical staff as well as ensuring the protection of working conditions.

WAITING LISTS

As of December 2016, there were 422,296 people waiting for either an inpatient, outpatient or diagnostic appointment.

The SDLP is determined to play a constructive role in dealing with what has been, and can only be described as, a crisis.

Each statistic is a person waiting for treatment, a person with cancer who has to wait more than a month for treatment or

someone who has been waiting longer than a year for an inpatient or outpatient appointment.

PAY FREEZE

The Northern Ireland Health Department and Executive's decision to reject clear recommendations from the independent pay review body and the pay regime for nurses, midwives and other health service professionals has become increasingly exploitative of people's strong sense of vocation. The long-standing freeze in their pay is a long-term pay cut in real terms.

The promises that the Agenda for Change would improve equity and transparency on pay have not materialised. The intention in the North is that the health and social care system will increasingly operate as a single employer yet there are health care professionals doing the exact same job in different trusts being paid different salaries. The smallest difference in job descriptions is being used cynically to trap people in lower pay bands. This is undermining morale and denying hardworking and dedicated professionals a fair and living wage.

The SDLP has argued, including at Westminster, that savings made from the voluntary exit scheme should be used for restorative pay measures rather than to pay for a cut in corporation tax. Public health staff who have been detrimentally affected by these freezes and who are stuck on unfair pay bands should be the first in line for this pay restoration.



CONTAMINATED BLOODS INQUIRY

The contamination of blood and blood products with HIV and Hepatitis C supplied by the NHS in the 1970s and early 1980s was a devastating and avoidable tragedy, which has affected more than 7,000 people and their families. It has already caused 2,000 deaths.

Support, financial and otherwise, over the years has been haphazard and has been delivered much too slowly.

The Irish Government admitted liability for importing infected bloods many years ago; the British Government must also accept full liability. The SDLP supports a full and fair settlement for all of those affected and for access to necessary medical treatment.

We will continue to push for a full inquiry to give the individuals and families the answers they deserve and for which they have waited far too long.

MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION

Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental ill-health than any other region of these islands. More than 200,000 people in the North suffer from some form of mental illness and almost half of these are directly related to the Troubles.

The SDLP believes that this is an area requiring significant attention to ensure an appropriate community based provision which addresses both the trauma imparted by the conflict and other areas of mental ill health such as eating disorders.

We are also acutely aware of and deeply concerned by levels of mental health problems that our young people are experiencing. We have advocated greater co-operation between health and education policy so that schools are better equipped to support the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils. Such safeguards should be designed similarly to the child protection system with which schools are familiar.

DOMICILARY CARE

The SDLP believes that there must be 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 health in later life.

This reform must promote independence and enable older people to exercise informed choice and control. There must be a clear shift towards community based services including care at home and respite services when needed.

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 want to see increased provisions for North-South healthcare including a joined-up approach to ambulance service provision in the border areas.



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 and that explores North-South options for cooperation.

At Westminster, the SDLP has proposed that an element of cancer drugs funding for innovative treatments should be done at a UK-wide level. This would go some way in resolving regional disparity in access to drugs, in which a patient in Northern Ireland may not have the same access to drugs that a patient in England or Wales does, particularly for innovative treatments and treatments for rarer and less common cancers.

NICE recommendations are often interpreted differently by devolved regions so we have proposed that there should be bespoke funding at a UK-wide level to remedy this. This would be welcomed by patients and by professions and Centres of Excellence that are trying to treat and innovate in these areas.

We have also made the suggestion that this could be done on a British-Irish Council level on an East-West basis for cancer and for rare diseases.

RURAL HEALTHCARE

There must be regional balance in the provision of services. We understand the importance of rural health services and want to sustain services there and plan for the provision of new services where capacity exists. The health needs of our rural communities must be met in places such as Daisy Hill, the Downe and South-West Regional hospitals as well as other acute facilities.

GENERAL PRACTICE AND PRIMARY CARE

Increased workloads, combined with a lack of investment in primary care has placed huge pressure on individual General Practitioners. This has led to a significant challenge arising in recruitment and retention of GPs, particularly evident in rural areas where we have seen young doctors choosing not to enter General Practice and experienced GPs leaving the sector.

We also face the challenge of many GPs opting for early retirement, taking with them valuable experience, knowledge and skills. The number of GP practices in the North has decreased to the lowest level in over 20 years and each GP surgery is, on average, now providing care to 500 more people than ten years previously. The SDLP recognises the need to review primary care services so that they are modelled in more accessible ways with easier referral pathways. SDLP MPs will support any efforts aimed at reframing services in such innovative ways.



ECONOMY

JOB CREATION

The Northern Ireland economy can only grow and develop if it generates more employment and focuses on securing better paid jobs. As the Brexit landscape unfolds, it is vital that the economic impact on Northern Ireland is mitigated as much as possible through Special Status, which allows the entire island to be treated as a single economic area and access to the Single Market and Customs Union retained.

The SDLP recognises that the main weight of job creation is at a devolved level. However, SDLP MPs deal with the budgetary, tax and wider economic policy that shapes the environment for enterprise and which can affect existing jobs and prospects for future investment. We will continue to represent the interests and concerns of sectors and firms in Northern Ireland in taxation and regulatory policies, which are dealt with at Westminster. We will also continue to lead the way in identifying and pushing for opportunities for Northern Ireland in UK Government frameworks e.g. City Deals and Enterprise Zones.

In the devolved context, we want to see a future Programme for Government that will assess every area of investment and expenditure in terms of its capacity to support existing employment and to 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. The SDLP also recognises the need to support our indigenous small and medium-sized enterprises and businesses and the vital role they have in creating employment across the North.

The North's 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.

CORPORATION TAX

The SDLP continues to support the devolution of Corporation Tax to Northern Ireland but we are under no illusion that it is the silver bullet others portray it as and have consistently raised this.

Only the SDLP highlighted the UK Government's budgetary conditions on the devolution of Corporation Tax, designed to give them a free hand to interfere in our devolved budget. Their readiness to do so was made clear through their actions on Welfare Reform. This 'balanced budget' condition could be employed by the UK Government to influence devolved decisions on areas such as water charges and tuition fees.

Whilst the DUP and Sinn Féin were content to accept the conditions on Corporation Tax, the SDLP will remain vigilant on the risks at Westminster and at the devolved level.



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

In a devolved context, it is vital that investment in third level education and apprenticeships is prioritised. Approximately 38% of our young people travel to Britain each year to study where fees are higher and where they incur more debt. Alasdair McDonnell has championed further and higher education as an economic driver as well as better tapping the intellectual capacity within our health services to help development in life sciences and related industries. The system the North deserves is one where young people can access appropriate higher and further education. This is the surest way to grow the North'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 believes that part-time undergraduate and post-graduate tuition fee loans must be implemented in the North. This tuition fee loan should be available to those who already have an undergraduate degree if they are returning to further or higher education to reskill in a STEM subject.

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 current apprenticeship model must be reviewed and enhanced so apprenticeships become an attractive alternative to further education and one that delivers sustainable employment.

EXPANSION OF MAGEE

The most obvious way to begin to address the under provision of university education in Northern Ireland is with 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. 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.

This expansion could also be a project to be considered for funding from the new North-South Structural Fund.



CITY DEALS

Numerous cities in England, Scotland and Wales have now secured City Deals. Yet the Executive repeatedly declined to enter negotiations with the Treasury to obtain City Deals for Northern Ireland. The SDLP has highlighted the role City Deals could play in addressing regional disparities and inequalities across the North. If the Executive is either unable or unwilling to pursue this opportunity for cities in the North, the SDLP will press the UK Treasury to work directly with our councils to secure City Deals.

NORTH WEST DEVELOPMENT AND THE EAST IRELAND CORRIDOR

Major investment in skills development and transport infrastructure is required in the North West to level the playing field with competing regions. The SDLP proposed and 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 East Ireland corridor has the potential to act as the foundation for advanced economic development. Containing twelve major centres of population, seven seaports with deep water berths and three commercial airports, the eastern corridor contains both major domestic markets and access to international markets.

The SDLP is calling for an East Ireland Corridor Strategy spanning local, regional and national governments which would include strategic infrastructural developments such as the Narrow Water Bridge.

SPECIAL STATUS AND BUSINESS

An open border is imperative to allow the continuation of the free flow of workers, capital, goods and services, which are vital to our economy.

37% - £3.6 billion—of the North's goods and services exports go to the South. An open border has been key to the ease of trade between North and South.

Part of the SDLP's proposals for Special Status for Northern Ireland involves the Island of Ireland being treated as a single economic area. Retaining our access to the Single Market and the Customs Union is vital for businesses and firms. Strand Two gives us the scope to do so regardless of the overall UK position.

We must use Strand Two to enable North-South parity and equivalence. The all-island single market for electricity must be maintained and opportunities for other all-island single markets for other relevant sectors must be explored.



EDUCATION

Education forms the building blocks of a shared society. Educational excellence is vital to achieving both social justice and long-term economic growth. Whilst most Westminster legislation does not directly affect the North, where it might, by implication, the SDLP will continue to reflect our opposition to academic selection at age 11, which is socially divisive and educationally unsound.

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 access for pupils to faith based, integrated, Irish medium and state education. We want to see local schools based within and supported by local communities.

The SDLP has always believed that a high quality education system is the cornerstone of a progressive society and plays a vital role in preparing children and young people for the future. Investment in education is an investment in our economy and enhances our ability to compete globally. Equipping our young people with cutting edge skills will create a sustainable, vibrant economy able to generate modern jobs in the future.

Our education system fails too many of our young people, many of whom leave school lacking acceptable numeracy and literacy skills. The SDLP believes that there must be a targeted aim of tackling the root causes of educational underachievement, which often stems from poverty and social deprivation.

Schools based in deprived areas will particularly feel the pressure of budget cuts, exacerbating problems they already face.

EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE

We recognise that Early Years Education is vital for our young people's development. 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.

Through the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Conception to Age 2, Mark Durkan has been working towards the creation of a pioneer community in the North to be an exemplar of early years intervention supporting children, parents and families.

The cost of childcare is a significant barrier for parents of young children entering the workforce. We believe that increasing free childcare provision is critical to families in Northern Ireland. That is why the SDLP has campaigned to increase childcare provision from 12.5 hours per week to 20 hours per week with a view to further increasing it to 30 hours.

Existing funding for childcare must be safeguarded through the Childcare Strategy. 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.



AN GHAELGE

Tá an SDLP fós tiomnaithe d'Acht na Gaeilge bunaithe ar chearta, a dhéanann an Ghaeilge a chosaint agus a fhorbairt i dTuaisceart Éireann. Creideann an SDLP gur le gach duine sa Tuaisceart an Ghaeilge agus go bhfuil reachtaíocht riachtanach chun cinnlú nach bhfuil sí faoi smacht ag aon Aire amháin. Cuirfimid lenár moltaí a bhí curtha faoi bhráid an Tionóil cheana féin.

Éilíonn an SDLP le haghaidh Acht na Gaeilge a n-áiríthtear aitheantas dlíthíuil don Ghaeilge agus a chiallaíonn lánpháirtíocht níos fearr i measc ár seirbhísí polblí: na hinstiúidí polaitíula, an rialtas áitiúil, córas an cheartais, an córas oideachais agus na meáin chumarsáide ina measc.

Creideann an SDLP gur cheart go mbeadh Acht na Gaeilge i bhfeidhm thall i Westminster sa chaois go mbeadh cumhachtaí ar leith atá coinnithe ag Westminster fós in ann teacht faoi údarás an Acharta, mar shampla cúrsaí craolacháin. Rachaidh an SDLP chuig Westminster ag cosaint na Gaeilge.

The SDLP remains dedicated to the establishment of a rights based Irish Language Act that protects and develops the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. The SDLP believes that the Irish Language belongs to everyone who wishes to embrace it and that legislation is essential to ensuring that the language is no longer at the mercy of any one minister.

The SDLP calls for an Act that ensures official legal recognition of the Irish Language and better Irish integration within our public services; including political institutions, local government, the justice system, education and the media.

The SDLP believes that an Irish Language Act should apply in Westminster to ensure that particular powers that Westminster has retained, such as broadcasting, are covered by the Act. The SDLP will go to Westminster and argue for the protection of the Irish Language.



ADDRESSING THE PAST

There is a continuing and 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. The SDLP's position on legacy issues and dealing with the past will always be based on a comprehensive human rights compliant process, the requirements of justice, truth and accountability and the needs of victims and survivors.

The SDLP strongly believes that the Victims and Survivors Service must be sustained and properly baseline funded.

British Governments have been very clear that they will seek to protect their wider state interests in relation to addressing the Past and in multiple ways resist accountability.

In this crucial period on addressing the Past with the potential of the British Government pressing on and tabling its legacy legislation, it is even more vital that there are voices and representatives in Westminster who will challenge the British Government on its approach. SDLP MPs have done and will do precisely that.

Throughout the various negotiations that have taken place since the Good Friday Agreement, the SDLP has pressed for the Agreement's promise to victims to be honoured and addressed. We regret the limited terms and positions of others. The range of the Eames-Bradley proposals have subsequently been degraded.

We supported the Haass-O'Sullivan proposals and regret that these in turn were reduced in the Stormont House and Fresh Start discussions.

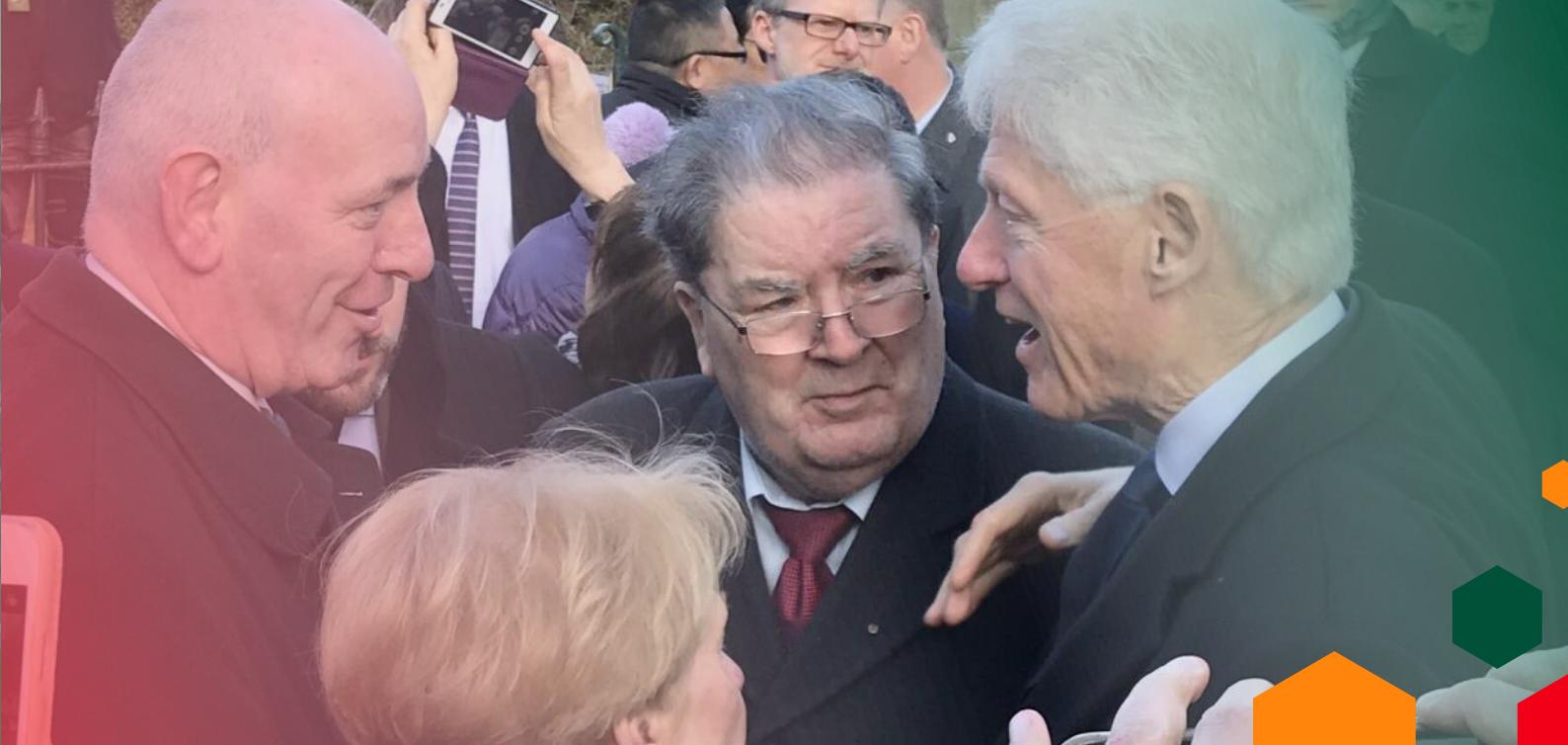
In further negotiations after the Westminster election the SDLP will work for justice, truth, accountability and the needs of victims and survivors to prevail.

HUMAN RIGHTS

We cannot trust Theresa May's false assurances on not moving on human rights until 2020. The 'next parliament' is now. Her reckless position on Brexit reflects how her government staggers into hard positions on issues. All signs suggest they will move on the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The SDLP will stridently oppose any attempt to caricature and devalue human rights at home and abroad. The Human Rights Act underpins the Good Friday Agreement; it must be complemented by rather than supplanted by a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. We will also vehemently oppose any attempts to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.

Diluting human rights affects people at home and weakens our ability to call out the abuse of human rights in other countries. We will also work to secure a commitment from the British Government that human rights form a key component of any future trade deals once the UK exits the EU.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The SDLP will continue to champion and defend international human rights. Our future relationship with the EU is not the only international issue at stake in this election: the international issues that people in the North care about are primarily dealt with at Westminster.

The SDLP was a strong advocate in ensuring that UK commitments to the Global Fund were secured early and will call out any attempts to adulterate it with dubious redefinition. SDLP MPs take an active interest in global health and in poverty alleviation in the poorest regions in the world. We support the 0.7% foreign aid target and will oppose any attempts to scrap it.

SDLP MPs efforts on and commitment to the Northern Ireland peace process gives them a unique perspective and credibility to promote human rights, peace and reconciliation across the world. Mark Durkan has served as an Officer of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group for a number of years, working with other parliamentarians, charities and NGOs to defend human rights.

From tackling tax evasion to speaking up for a humanitarian approach to refugees to opposing Theresa May entering a war footing with Donald Trump, the SDLP will be there to say loudly and clearly: "Not in our name".

The SDLP's influence reaches far beyond these shores. As members of the Party of European Socialists, we are part of a strong social democratic team of 191 MEPs, 8 Prime Ministers and 8 members of the European Commission championing human rights and social justice.

The votes of SDLP MPs and our allies have defeated the British Government's reckless approach to foreign affairs and intervention in the Middle East.

We are proud nationalists and internationalists. The global challenges of tax justice, climate change and eliminating poverty can only be solved through cooperation with our sister parties across the world. The SDLP is best placed to advance those goals.



GROWING OUR TOURISM SECTOR

Tourism is one of our natural assets and with proper structures and supports, it is an industry that we could lead in, supporting the economy and creating jobs and training opportunities.

The SDLP recognises the potential of tourism to transform the local economy and understands the industry needs support to develop.

Margaret Ritchie founded and co-chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Visitors' Economy. This group provides strong representation for the tourism industry and advocates for the needs of the hospitality sector on what is required to improve the industry, especially outside Greater Belfast and in rural areas. It campaigns in Westminster for the cutting of VAT on tourism that would better enable the industry to grow and develop, boosting the local economy.

Through the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, Alasdair McDonnell has advocated for an end to Air Passenger Duty (APD) to support airports in the North to compete with those in the South. The SDLP has voted in favour of eradicating APD in several Westminster budgets. Devolving APD would be the first step in enabling our airports to obtain new routes and enhance our tourism industry and boost the local economy.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture is one of the bedrocks of Northern Ireland's economy. On the critical issues facing the industry as a result of Brexit, the SDLP is the leading voice for the North on the issues facing farmers, fishermen and the agri-food industry.

Margaret Ritchie has been the leading voice for Northern Ireland on the EFRA Committee at Westminster since 2012 providing strong representation on a range of issues, from farmgate prices and fluctuations in dairy prices to air quality and animal welfare.

AGRI-FOOD

A competitive agri-food industry remains crucial to the North's growing export market and we must cultivate a flexible industry able to match rising demand.

Brexit has created huge uncertainty for the agriculture sector and it is vital that swift efforts are made to diversify trade links. The SDLP strongly advocates increased access to diverse markets to help the North's agri-food industry to thrive and grow. In particular pork exports to China is an issue that the SDLP has campaigned on extensively.

The SDLP sees sustainable export markets for Northern Ireland agriculture products as key to growing this sector even further. A strong voice at Westminster can help to achieve this.



PROTECTING THE FARMING COMMUNITY FROM BREXIT

The threat of Brexit poses significant issues for farmers and farming communities, in terms of income, tariffs and controls for food produced within Ireland. Having a strong voice for Northern Ireland on the EFRA Committee and in the House of Commons chamber counts.

From fluctuation in farmgate prices to the government's transitional arrangements to replace the Common Agricultural Policy, we will work to give voice to the concerns of farmers across the North, questioning ministers on the measures they are taking to safeguard the agricultural industry.

The British Government must urgently detail its plans on how it will replace the EU Single Farm Payment and other supports provided by the EU.

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 work to protect our coastlines, by supporting the expansion of the role and support for the Coastal Erosion Taskforce.

FRACKING

The SDLP fundamentally opposes the introduction of fracking in the North and has spoken out firmly against it at Westminster. 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.

RURAL BROADBAND

The SDLP will continue to fight for better rural broadband for rural communities across the North. Remote rural areas with poor or no internet access are at a distinct disadvantage, whether they are families, business people or farmers. Better superfast broadband is essential to create jobs and employment and to help to grow the economy. The SDLP will continue to campaign at Westminster and the Assembly for the needs of those in rural economies who urgently need better access to broadband for their communities and businesses.

ANIMAL CRUELTY

At Westminster, SDLP MPs have been active in highlighting the various aspects of animal cruelty and defending animal welfare. We have a strong, long standing policy against the barbaric practice of fox hunting and will vote against any attempts to overturn the foxhunting ban. This practice must be stopped and those who are responsible must be brought to justice.



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**SDLP WESTMINSTER
ELECTION MANIFESTO**

**TAKING OUR SEATS
TAKING A STAND**



Published by:

SDLP Headquarters
121 Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 1SH

Printed by:

Minprint Ltd
401 Castlereagh Road
Belfast
BT5 6QP

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