SDLP

Submission to the Programme for Government Consultation 2016

Contents

Introduction.....5
New Legislative Proposals.....6
Embracing a Reform Agenda.....9
Building a comprehensive Programme for Government.....10
The full Scottish Experience.....10
Equality Screening.....11
The Northern Irish context.....11
Not one size fits all.....11
'To Protect the interests of Northern Ireland in Europe and to retain our membership of the EU'.....12
The Democratic Will.....12
Axis of Influence.....12
The Essential Issues.....12
Strength and weakness.....12
The next steps.....13
North South.....13
A Paradigm Shift.....13
Every means at our disposal.....13
Ambition again.....13
The Future.....13
Legacy.....14
Addressing the Past.....14
The Executive Office.....15
Protecting and deepening the rights of our people.....15
Gear change.....15
Institutional Abuse.....16
Anti-Poverty – A Defining Feature.....16
Other Rights issues.....17
Securing our Finances.....17
Further Devolution.....17
City Deals.....18
Brexit.....18
Public Sector Pay and Conditions.....18

Mapping Financial Flows 18
Small Business Rates 18
Budget Process Reform 19
Poverty 19
A Prosperous Economy 19
Agri-food sector 20
Northern Ireland Manufacturing Strategy 20
Investment in third level education and apprenticeships 21
Regional Economic Balance Bill 21
A Just and safe community 22
Brexit – North and South 22
Incitement 22
Prison Reform 22
Historical Abuse 22
Legacy Inquests & Investigations 23
Organised Crime 23
Rights Based Approach 23
Problem Solving 24
Lines of Demarcation 24
A Healthy and thriving society 24
Transforming Your Care 24
General Practice 25
Access to treatments 25
Mental health Provision 26
Preventative Spending and Public Health 26
North-south healthcare 26
A Strategic approach to Infrastructural Development 27
Regeneration and unlocking potential 27
Connectivity 28
Political reform 28
Regional Balance and linkages 28
A 20-year strategy 28
Department of Education 29
Curriculum 29
Numeracy and Literacy 29
From STEM to STEAM 29

Academic Selection....29
Early Years....30
Childcare....30
Special Needs Education....30
Youth Services....30
Shared Education....31
Teacher Training....31
Education provision....31
A comfortable and confident Community....31
Housing and Homelessness:....31
Poverty....32
Fuel Poverty....32
Child Poverty....32
Social Responsibility and Welfare....33
Culture and Sport....33
Libraries....33
Broadcasting....33
Growing Rural areas....34
Brexit....34
Rural Development....34
Basic Payment Scheme....34
Independent Environment Agency....34
Agri-food sector....34
Farming....35
Farm Business Expansion Scheme....35
Fisheries....35
Contamination of Beef Products....35
Farm gate Prices....35
All Island Labelling....36
Nomadic Livestock....36

Introduction

After the Assembly elections, the SDLP worked hard to have a strong Programme for Government process and content with the ambition that in this mandate - unlike the previous mandate- government would live up to the needs of the people.

In the aborted Programme for Government negotiation, the SDLP submitted more papers and proposals than any party. We advised people and groups to submit their proposals to OFMdFM in the rundown to the Assembly election to help shape a strong PFG after the election.

We were serious about going into government and about a PFG that was serious in bringing about a government that witnessed a paradigm shift in terms of relevance and delivery.

It is clear that the DUP and Sinn Fein want to do things strictly on their own terms – which usually ends up being on DUP terms. That is what happened with "Fresh Start" when the DUP presented their proposals less than an hour before an Executive meeting to endorse them.

It happened again when the DUP and Sinn Fein took a "take it or leave it" attitude to the PFG talks after the Assembly election. And time may shortly tell if Addressing the Past will be on DUP, Sinn Fein and London terms not the terms that live up to the needs of victims and survivors.

This submission to the PFG process again demonstrates the serious intention of the SDLP. Over the next months in the rundown to the adoption of a PFG the party shall publish further commentaries and proposals on how best to shape government, policy, politics, the North, the island and our place in Europe.

This submission is unashamedly ambitious. First, a legislative programme the likes of which has not been the case at any time since the partition of Ireland. In this submission there are proposals for 50 bills and 15 areas urgently requiring reform to illustrate some of the areas the SDLP shall be pursuing over the next mandate.

Second, policy proposals that would see a paradigm shift across government in the North, on the island and in the context of Europe

Third, the liberation of the values of the Agreement so that they are the lifelines of policy and politics not just notionally referred to.

Fourth, proposals that further reform government and embed accountability in real rigorous terms. This includes how to optimise business, civic, NGO and third party input to policy and politics in general.

Fifth, an outcomes based approach that is done in the right way as opposed to being adopted in a functional way. The DUP, even the NICS, approach is to adopt the form but not apply and deploy the full learning and lessons from the outcomes approach to the circumstances in Northern Ireland.

The content of this document should be read together with the two appendices attached which refer to the SDLP 2016 Assembly manifesto and papers submitted to the aborted PFG discussions.

This is the first in a series of commentaries from the SDLP to make devolution work to its full, make the island work to its full and sustain our relationship with Europe.

New Legislative Proposals

The SDLP have identified priority areas which require urgent bespoke legislation. These include:

1. A Regeneration Bill to transfer regeneration powers to Local Councils.

2. Lobbying Bill to regulate the representations and lobbying of public representatives, Ministers, public officials, SpAds, the staff of political parties and representatives.

3. A Marriage Equality Bill to provide equal recognition to married LGBT couples.

4. Members Register of Interests Bill to introduce new penalties for the failure to declare interests.

5. Liquor Licensing Bill to assist the business of the hospitality and entertainment industries.

6. Gambling Reform Bill inter alia to include provision for regulated gambling including on Sundays.

7. Housing Bill no 1 to better regulate the private rented sector.

8. Housing Bill no 2 to build on the functions of the NIHE and to make provision for the NIHE to manage its stock.

9. A Bill to make provision for relevant bodies to disclose information to qualified persons for those self-harming or at risk of suicide.

10. An Early Education and Care Act Bill to provide a comprehensive approach to ensure no child is denied the very best possible start in life.

11. A Homelessness Bill to tackle the tragedy of homelessness and housing stress.

12. A Flooding Bill to ensure that householders and business susceptible to flooding are not punished time and time again.

13. A Bill to make financial redress for victims of institutional and clerical abuse

14. An Inquiry Bill to make provision for inquiry into clerical abuse.

15. An Inquiry Bill to make provision for inquiry into Mother and Child cases not covered by the mandate of the Hart Inquiry.

16. Legislation to address age discrimination.

17. A Bill to make provision for a Bill of Rights for the people of Northern Ireland and a subsequent all-Ireland Charter of Rights.

18. A Bill to provide for the protection of Immigrants and Asylum Seekers in terms of safety, public services and support within Northern Ireland.

19. A Bill to develop the areas of responsibility of the Northern Ireland Consumer Council.

20. A Bill to require that the offices of First and deputy First Minister are elected on a joint nomination and by a cross-community vote of the Assembly.

21. A Bill for Sign Language legislation to improve sign language users access to services.

22. A Fisheries Bill to address matters that had failed to be addressed during the previous mandate.

23. A Credit Union Bill to consolidate and support the role of social responsible lenders and address deficiencies in the CUCCBS Bill.

24. An Energy Bill to address energy efficiency, licences, gas storage provisions, enforcement and matters related to the energy industry.

25. A Climate Change Bill to place in law binding obligations for carbon reduction.

26. A Bill to create in law an Independent Environment Agency to protect Northern Ireland's natural assets.

27. A Bill to provide for cooperation between relevant parties and agencies in relation to Special Educational Needs provision.

28. A Safe Property Bill to require owners of properties which are dilapidated or dangerous or sites which are neglected to make safe those properties and otherwise address their various ownership responsibilities.

29. An Applied Syllabus Bill to expand the provision of vocational education at post-primary levels.

30. An invasive Species Bill to tackle the blight of harmful invasive species.

31. A Bill to provide for regionally balanced development and investment.

32. Legislation to define sectarianism informed by international standards on other forms of racism.

33. Legislation on incitement to hatred to be informed by the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination.

34. An Arts and Creativity Bill to provide a creative industries development strategy for Northern Ireland.

35. Legislation to establish a multi-agency Drugs Strategy which will target drug dealers and ring fence seized assets to provide help to those recovering from addiction.

36. Reform and Rehabilitation Bill which provides a reoffending prevention strategy including a 12-month post release supervision programme.

37. Legislation to provide for and protect the provision of GP and other primary care services, including mental health services, in rural areas.

38. Caring for Carers Protection Legislation to protect, recognise and reward the role that carers play in our society.

39. Legislation to license Bonfires to prevent anti-social behaviour and prevent environmental damage.

40. Legislation to provide for a bespoke Programmes for Local Government.

41. An Irish Language Act

42. Legislation to establish Educational Priority Zones in areas such as Derry and Strabane accompanied with targeted intervention measures.

43. Expansion of Magee campus in line with local stakeholders

44. Updating of legislation regarding Animal Welfare and penalties regarding neglect and abuse.

45. Legislation to harmonise Maternity and Paternity provision with European practices.

46. Amend the Water and Sewerage Act to remove Ministerial provision to introduce Water charges.

47. Legislate to provide for 30 hours a week free Childcare.

48. A Single Equality Act.

49. Job Creation targets for Invest NI and other industrial investment initiatives.

50. A Bill to provide for a Drugs and Alcohol strategy to combat substance abuse.

Embracing a Reform Agenda

The SDLP believe that to deliver quality effective governance, government itself must always be willing to reform. As such we have identified particular areas, listed below, which require urgent attention.

1. The creation of a time bound Fiscal Review Commission to review our fiscal structures to assess the opportunities of the devolution of new powers desirable in itself but made critical for the protection of domestic interests following the Brexit vote.

2. The creation of a Budget Scrutiny Committee to interrogate the public finances and interrogate budget processes.

3. Mechanisms to better ensure that a petition of concern is only deployed in the circumstances as originally envisaged being where equality and human rights provisions are engaged.

4. The implementation of the new Direction agreed by the Committee on Standards and Privileges to enable persons to have the support and ability to fully and properly pursue complaints.

5. An early review of the new Code of Conduct for members to ensure the Code is comprehensive and is being adhered to including member's commitment to support in word and deed to the rule of law.

6. A Code of Conduct for member's staff.

7. The creation of a Welfare Reform Oversight Committee to monitor and advise on the implementation of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and the Welfare Reform Act 2016 check and mitigation of its impact.

8. The extension of Topical Questions to 25 minutes and the reduction of Oral Questions to 25 minutes.

9. The abolition of the post of principal Deputy Speaker.

10. The reduction of the number of SpAds in the Executive Office.

11. Provision in standing orders for opposition further to the passage of the Assembly Opposition Bill.

12. Provision for Assembly consideration of budget issues further to the Fresh Start legislation.

13. Consideration of how to ensure compliance by Ministers with the guidelines on papers to committees agreed by the Executive and Chairpersons Liaison Group.

14. Provision for Ministers to attend their statutory committee once a session for a stocktaking discussion.

15. Establishing a dedicated strategy for transparency and accountability in elected office.

Building a comprehensive Programme for Government

This commentary identifies the deficits in the Framework PFG and proposes remedies to secure the bold ambition so lacking in the Framework. The Brexit decision, the slowing economic environment, new phases of austerity approaching, the failure of much of government over the last two mandates makes compelling the need to secure a PFG fully fit for purpose.

The full Scottish Experience

It is a good development that there is to be an outcomes based approach. It is good that the Northern Irish Government seeks to learn from the example and experience of the Scottish Government. But the example and experience should be embraced not in a single way with an outcomes approach but in ways that apply all that is useful in the Scottish method.

This is not the case in the Framework which is a DUP and it appears a NICS version of that approach that is not configured to the circumstances here and does not deploy all the learning from Scotland and Wales. For example, the SDLP believes that the character of the administrative system here is too often conservative, conventional, risk-averse and defensive. To secure the paradigm shifts across policy areas persons of authority from outside government should be long term seconded into departments, at senior and other ranks, in complex policy areas and for the purposes of developing and drafting new legislation.

There are limitless areas where this would benefit. Experts from small business, climate groups, childcare, human rights, welfare advocacy… a vast range of policy areas would benefit from this approach. Indeed, in general and because of an outcomes based approach, this model needs to be deployed to maximise and integrate the purported new way of working to ensure old ways of working do not endure.

The SDLP would comment further. How is the new statutory duty to co-operate on children's services to be realised and optimised without the hands on insight and wisdom of children's services specialists within and without government. The answer is self-evident and the SDLP encourages a wide scale deployment of external persons in the life of departments.

Moreover, an outcomes based approach is best enabled where those who are the objects of outcomes are properly involved. In that regard, the discarding of the Civic Forum looks more and more the folly that it is. A small scale advisory panel devised by the DUP falls far short of the civic input to policy and politics that even recent circumstances demand. Models of Social Partnership, a revised Civic Forum and bespoke mechanisms to input to policy and government are needed not least at a time of gathering risk.

Equality Screening

Section 75 requires equality impact screening yet the Framework deploys the duty in relation to the outcomes based approach in itself. This is in stark contrast to measuring it against what that approach should be and the strategic policies, actions and other interventions that flow.

The Framework adopts a partial equality approach not a full-blooded equality approach. This is not compliant with the law but in the real time of a government mandate it has dramatic consequences. In the last two mandates "not an inch" of the A5 and A6 was built. During the same time, new roads were built from Jordanstown towards Carrickfergus, Larne towards Belfast and now outside Ballymena towards Ballymoney. These roads are needed but infrastructure located in the East brings about a new economic partition of the North.

This is why equality standards and proofing are so vital. That is why this PfG Framework is so lacking.

The Northern Irish context

Moreover, an outcomes approach must be strictly informed and shaped by the particular environment, policy and legal context and political obligations in Northern Ireland. This is not the case in the Framework.

One of the defining features of the Northern Irish policy and legal architecture is its equality and rights requirements. Too much of these requirements are missing from the Framework. Elements of the Framework relate to human rights indicators on ESC rights but in other areas the Framework is silent. Some of this is verging on unforgivable. With the catastrophic child poverty narrative, the PFG must include a Childs Rights Indicator Framework grounded in UN standards as recommended to the Executive. If the PfG is to be the rights based approach it should then that be a similar argument applies in relation to the Executive developing an Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index.

The content of the Framework in relation to equality, its mainstreaming, monitoring and statistical rigour is muddled. A number of issues are unclear or simply missing or strangely incomplete. The need to disaggregate data is compelling. In its absence the empirical basis for a growing assault on inequality splutters. Yet the Framework is unclear on disaggregation across the different Section 75 categories and indicators on housing and employment are simply missing. With society changing, there is not a mention of an indicator on the rights of minorities and the proposed "Respect Index" lacks any definition.

Not one size fits all

The PFG has to be qualitative and quantitative. A slavish approach, a one-size fits all approach will not be successful. Moreover, outcomes are more than numbers and quantities-they also have to be about the impact on people and the specific outcomes on communities. This corroborates the argument elsewhere in this submission that statistics have to be disaggregated to have the fullest understanding of their meaning.

Processes arising from an outcomes based approach must be cross-departmental and cross-sectional. If not, there will be a conflict in managing a programme on poverty on the one hand and the imperative of reducing poverty in the other.

'To Protect the interests of Northern Ireland in Europe and to retain our membership of the EU'

The Democratic Will

The people of Northern Ireland voted to Remain. That is the democratic wish and that wish should be upheld. This is the alpha and the omega. This is the basis of all which follows.

The SDLP has been clear and certain in its response to the EU vote. We say that every means should be deployed – political, legal, constitutional, popular - to uphold the democratic wish of the people here and for people here to retain our membership of the EU.

The democratic argument sourced in the Northern Irish referendum result has great authority but so too others. The issues raised by the 1998 Inter-Governmental Treaty, the Good Friday Agreement itself, the 1998 and 2016 referenda, the human rights and equality guarantees in Northern Ireland to name four confirm that range of argument that the SDLP will deploy to protect the interests of all our citizens.

Axis of Influence

The SDLP say that a main axis of influence to uphold the democratic will and protect our citizens is through the people and parties of the island working together to secure our best interests and through the establishment by the Irish Government of a Standing Commission on Ireland in Europe to best shape the coming period in the event of Brexit and after.

We say that a main axis of influence is through the European institutions, the many friends of Northern Ireland in Europe and in particular socialist parties and governments.

The SDLP say that we should be close to and co-operative with the Government of Scotland as it uses argument to uphold the democratic will of the people of Scotland.

The Essential Issues

The SDLP says that the 5 essential issues to be addressed in any negotiation are trade and markets; the four freedoms; EU support for peace and for people from farmers to those in need to those in border areas to communities in all areas; maintenance of European standards from human rights to the environment to worker's entitlements and how Ireland influences Europe, its institutions and future direction if Brexit happens.

Strength and weakness

The SDLP has been clear, certain and strong. Others have been weak and predictable. The DUP put all their eggs in the London basket though London will look first after its own interests. Sinn Fein advance on and then retreat from a border poll, reduced to raging against the EU vote, lacking the craft to shape a scale of response given the scale of risk.

This weakness sits in stark contrast to the Scottish Government. They say that there is "a blank sheet of paper", previously "unthinkable options" exist and that Scotland is very strong as the British Prime Minister has said the Article 50 will not be triggered until there was "a UK approach and objectives." If Scotland has good argument to uphold the will of the people of Scotland, the arguments are wider and deeper to uphold the will of the people here.

The next steps

The SDLP believe that the decision to exit the EU must be resisted by all means possible. The decision is having and will have immense economic, social and cultural consequences which threaten our interests. This time can also liberate our thinking on the character and content of the future, particularly on the island of Ireland.

North South

A Paradigm Shift

The SDLP has published multiple proposals and commentaries on North South. The narrative has been consistent. The opportunities are multiple, ambition is lacking, the DUP have frustrated these bodies potential. This mandate must see a paradigm shift in the scale and achievement of North South cooperation.

This was already the case before the EU referendum. It is now even more the case. The impact of Brexit will be greater for Northern Ireland than any part of these islands and with its impact on Ireland profound.

Every means at our disposal

The SDLP will use every means at its disposal to frustrate Brexit. With the 56% democratic Remain vote, we will work to uphold the principle of consent. We are not lacking power in that regard. We will use every democratic means-legal, political, constitutional and popular-to uphold the democratic will.

Consistent with this objective, the SDLP shall work to protect existing North South and seek bold thinking and radical expansion in the range of North South. This requirement should be at the core of the Programme for Government, be a stated outcome of the Programme for Government and be free of the shackles around North South evident since restoration of devolution in 2007.

Ambition again

The various SDLP commentaries confirm how North South has been impeded. The success to date, significant in a number of areas, should have been a catalyst for more. Rather there has been a drag on its potential. This should now be rectified.

The Future

The future of North-South should revolve around principles including:

- Respect for an outworking of the Northern Ireland vote to Remain including in the context of Ireland in the European Union.
- Protection of the existing strand 2 arrangements and sectoral architecture
- New ambition and paradigm shift in the scale and working of North South
- A mechanism established by the Irish Government on “Ireland, the Future and European Union” involving the parties, people and representative groupings across the life of the island.

- New and accelerated work on the 2006 British-Irish Report on an All-Ireland Economy, the 2007 North-South Health Study, Irish Academy of Engineers 2010 Study on Infrastructure, 2012 Bradley Study on Cross Border Economic Renewal, 2012 Study on all island Procurement, the proposal for an all-Ireland Energy Authority and Independent Environment Agency.

The Brexit vote has created a new dynamic in politics. It should herald a liberation of North-South as an essential element in the protection of the interests of the people of Ireland whatever does or does not happen with the Brexit negotiation.

Legacy

The work on comprehensively Addressing the Past needs quickly resolved in ways that fulfil the requirements of justice, truth, accountability and acknowledgement, including further assessment of a victim's pension. The SDLP has written to the two Governments to outline the opportunities and the dangers.

The party states again its concern that.as with Fresh Start and the formation of the Executive, some interests may seek to conclude the negotiation on their terms not the right terms. The DUP, Sinn Fein and London have common and separate reasons to deny the Past and impede the needs of victims and survivors. They cannot be allowed to prevail.

Addressing the Past

Victims and survivors of decades of the violence of state and of terror groups must be the primary purpose, imperative and concern in Addressing the Past. If the vested interests of the state or the terror groups prevail, the needs of victims will be severely diminished. This is one of the fundamental questions that must continue to be asked and answers sought.

There are 4 pillars in Addressing the Past-mechanisms for justice, truth, accountability and acknowledgement. It is not too late to create mechanisms that live up to higher thresholds than is currently outlined under Stormont House and subsequent discussions and better serve the needs of victims and survivors. This too is one of the fundamental questions to be asked and answered.

The SDLP is committed to Addressing the Past on a comprehensive and ethical basis. The party has produced multiple proposals to do so over a long period of time. This has been the approach of the SDLP over its history: to craft proposals –politics, policing, parading, the past, the NCA and other issues- to shape the future fundamentally different from the past. The party asks the London Government to work outside the London paradigm that often and repeatedly seeks to manage the past to evade disclosure, accountability and truth.

There have been a series of interventions over the last decade to address the legacy of the Past. If Eames/Bradley was the high watermark, each subsequent conversation has witnessed a degradation in its thresholds. The broad architecture of Eames/Bradley may appear to exist in Haass/O'Sullivan , even Stormont House, but its scale, powers and ambition have been degraded and more so with each negotiation.

It is the view of the SDLP that one of the essential reasons has been the vested interests of state and non-state agencies which together seek to resist truth, justice and accountability. Again this is an essential issue in navigating the next period.

The SDLP strongly believe that if the requirements of victims and survivors are to be best realized, higher thresholds and greater rigour is required across the various mechanisms proposed to Address the Past.

That remains the approach of the party. That is the approach that informed the contributions of the party on this issue. This is reflected and confirmed in the multiple, real-time submissions to, for example, the Autumn 2015 negotiations.

The SDLP believe that it should be assessed if there is an opportunity for greater ambition than current conventional thinking on Addressing the Past to better serve the needs of victims and survivors. That assessment will be pivotal in whether or not the needs of victims and survivors prevail.

The Executive Office

Protecting and deepening the rights of our people

The Brexit vote has and will raise a range of issues about the protection of human rights and compliance with the European and wider obligations. The risks inherent is more acute given the evidence that the Northern Irish government has been lacking in the protection of the rights of our citizens including with the passage of wave after wave of austerity budgets.

The evidence that is gathering in relation to absolute and relative child poverty and the July 2015 High Court judgment against OFMdFM on its failure to produce an anti-poverty strategy are indicative of the weakness of the Northern Irish government to fully protect the rights of citizens.

Gear change

There is a need for an urgent gear change in the protection and deepening of citizen and community rights in Northern Ireland, part of which will require new initiatives on the island. This should be explicit in the PFG, an explicit element in the Brexit negotiations and an explicit feature of North-South.

There are multiple requirements to scope, shape and put in place the protections that are needed including:

- A new conversation on a Northern Irish Bill of Rights involving a reconfigured Civic Forum and dedicated mechanisms to input on policy proposals
- A new initiative on a Charter of Rights for the island with the respective Human Rights Commissions taking forward a dedicated work programme
- Production and/or updating of strategies on sexual orientation, poverty, immigration and racism and gender
- A challenging approach on the many international reviews and examinations scheduled over the next 2 years including: June 2016 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural UK examination; Convention on the Rights of the Child examination May 2016; Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination examination August 2016; International Convention on Civil and Political Rights Follow Up due July 2017; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women examination July 2017; Convention Against Torture report due by May 2017; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2017 (date to be set), Universal Periodic Review by the UN Rights Council mid-2017 and Framework Convention National Minorities Opinion On 4th UK Report due June 2016.
- Provision should be made for An Irish Language Act / Acht naGaelige and the publication of strategies on the Irish Language and Ulster-Scots.

Institutional Abuse

It was its own withering indictment of the "Framework PFG" that it was so silent on the requirements of victims and survivors of institutional abuse. This must be rectified in the PFG and forthcoming budget lines. It has a number of elements.

First, the commitment to accept and quickly implement the recommendations of the Hart Inquiry. Second, scoping now of models of financial address noting that Judge Hart has stated that this will be a recommendation. The failure to scope options and the absence of a Budget line in the 16/17 budget must be rectified in the PFG and budget proposals for 17/21.

Third, urgent decisions on methods of inquiry in to cases of clerical abuse outside the institutions and Mother and Child Homes out with the mandate of Hart. The Executive processes to review these matters must now conclude and decisions made in a short timeframe. Fourth adequate funding for victim and survivor groups in the crucial help and support that they provide to their members.

The needs of victims and survivors should be front and centre in this mandate. This includes the many victims of clerical abuse. It must also mean the victims of the violence of the state and the terror organisations in respect of which the SDLP has included a separate paper in this PFG submission.

Anti-Poverty – A Defining Feature

The catastrophic current and coming levels of child poverty in particular and poverty in general means that this issue and its confrontation should be a defining feature of this mandate. For this to happen it needs precise and exhaustive details and commitments.

The adoption of a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need, is urgently required and there is a duty under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to do so. This has been confirmed by the judgement in July 2015's Judicial Review.

The issue of a strategy to tackle poverty needs to be explicit in the PFG, be robust rights-based approach, be subject to extensive assessment and monitoring and be a defining feature of this mandate. This requires robust definitions, again informed by international standards on socio-economic rights and objective need. In this mandate the allocation of monies and resources to address poverty and other structural need must not be based on anonymous, vague or neutral standards but on sound and challenging criteria.

The approach to poverty is a hard test for the outcomes based approach, the new departmental structures and integrated government. There needs to be targets and real targets to reduce poverty generally, in named categories including women and among children. With the passage of wave after wave of Northern Irish austerity budgets and with the economic downturn post 23 June the starkness of the poverty challenge and the imperative to act becomes more and more urgent.

Of course, the issue of poverty is in a wider context. The need to provide social housing and affordable housing, rent control issues, the provision of skills and infrastructure in all parts, socially responsible procurement, a proper living wage, austerity welfare and much else is the spectrum of how poverty generally must be addressed.

Other Rights issues

There are multiple other rights issues that need to be addressed including:

- Adoption of respective strategies on the Irish Language and Ulster Scots where the legal duty to do both remains outstanding.
- The proofing of proposals in and arising from Stormont House and Fresh Start to assess their equality impacts and including welfare provisions in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.
- Legislation to define sectarianism informed by international standards on other forms of racism
- A Bill to define good relations based on the approaches in law in Scotland, Wales and England.
- Further work to advance resolution of parading issues, first through sustained, direct, meaningful, sustained dialogue and second the maintenance of an independent Parades Commission as the best model to determine parade disputes. The SDLP repeats its rejection of the profoundly flawed DUP/SF proposals of 2010.
- Progression of the work of the Commission on Identity and Flags based on the principles, values and requirements of the Good Friday Agreement.
- The further deepening of proposals to develop a shared and united community given the transparent lack of ambition in TBUC.
- Sustained and proper baseline funding of the VSS during the years of the mandate.

Securing our Finances

Northern Ireland's current financial situation requires significant change as centralised power is a concept which is now rooted in the past. The extensive federal and devolution settlements, which have for some time been a feature of other European democracies, are gaining and growing in relevance throughout these islands. From the Smith Commission, to the implementation of City Deals across England and Scotland, more and more centralised power is being pushed downwards and outwards.

The Northern Ireland Executive must make the most of this opportunity and embrace the potential of an enhanced devolution settlement which provides us with the power to shape our own future. The Programme for Government must commit the Northern Ireland Executive to negotiations with London on an expanded fiscal framework which will give Northern Ireland sufficient financial security to take on long term transitions such as our own tax system and our own welfare system.

Further Devolution

The devolution of corporation tax, while welcome, is simply not enough. The UK Government's recent announcement of their intent to further reduce the UK's corporation tax has removed much of our competitive advantage, while the Republic continues to target key economic growth areas by sectoral specific reductions in their rate of corporation tax.

The Northern Ireland Executive therefore needs to get control of further economic levers, not only the power to vary corporation tax, but new fiscal and borrowing powers. In the context of both further devolutions in Scotland and a possible Brexit – which will restrict social, economic and political systems – the Department of Finance should establish a commission to examine potential new fiscal levels.

Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union, and therefore we should seek to gain all new powers possible in order to take our destiny back into our own hands and design our own solutions.

City Deals

The Northern Ireland Executive must seek immediate negotiations with the British Treasury to implement new City Deals in the North. Consideration should be given to developing a City Deal in Derry to address regional inequalities and disparities. Interventions should be targeted and multi-dimensional, at the level of the individual, household and region or city. Sectoral specific enterprise zones could also be considered for the incubation and growth of domestic start-ups and to foster business clusters to increase productivity. This will require partnership between the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Executive.

Brexit

The result of the recent referendum on membership of the European Union will have a wide, long lasting and detrimental impact on both domestic businesses and our attractiveness as a destination for Foreign Direct Investment. The indeterminate length of any negotiation process, the potential loss of access to the European Single Market and the devaluation of our credit ratings and currency value will all serve to undermine investor confidence. With the most recent economic forecasts predicting a negligible growth rate for Northern Ireland coupled with the absence of any contingency plan from the Northern Ireland Executive, there needs to be an immediate audit of the impact of loss of both direct funding such as the agricultural subsidies and structural funds, loss of access to projects such as Horizon 2020 and the impact of inhibition of access to markets.

Public Sector Pay and Conditions

There is considerable scope to improve the operation of the public sector by raising productivity to improve services. The SDLP believes that the streamlining of the public sector to date could have been achieved by prudent management rather than by borrowing huge amounts of capital to finance a severance scheme. The end of the civil service pay freeze must mean increases for lower paid civil servants. It cannot be used to fund more special advisers or rehire at the highest levels.

We wish to see the Executive publish as a matter of urgency plans to enable public sector pay recovery.

The SDLP also believes there is a pressing need to raise pay entry bands for new entrants to public sector to ensure it attracts highly motivated and qualified applicants.

Mapping Financial Flows

Although there are significant poverty levels in Northern Ireland, there are also substantial savings paid into ISAs, savings accounts etc. If a development bank is formed, we could keep this money in Northern Ireland rather than see it leave.

Small Business Rates

Northern Ireland has one of the lowest numbers of businesses per 10,000 of the population and has experienced a 2% fall in the number of businesses since 2010, compared with a 10% increase in, for example, the south of England. We are not helping to foster an entrepreneurial culture because it is immensely difficult for a start-up business to locate in any of our towns or local shopping stretches

because of business rates and the fact that, quite simply, many banks will just not lend to a business start-up that hopes to trade on a high street.

In the first instance, rates have to be fair and reasonable and, in some way, linked as far as possible to the profitability of the business. Second, there needs to be a ministerial policy change in relation to the actions of LPS to make it less aggressive in its NAV assessments and revise the majority of NAVs to the rents actually payable on the property, rather than selectively choosing rental deals that were struck possibly at the top of the property boom as supporting evidence. Vacant premises, particularly in town centres, are no good for anybody.

Budget Process Reform

The current budget system simply does not work, and the Northern Ireland Executive needs to look very seriously at the need for the reform of our budget process. The current situation does not allow time for sufficient scrutiny by the relevant committee. A reformed budgeting process should start as day one. At the moment, a budget just 'tinkers' with the previous one. They are a cut-and-paste of information that is coming over from London, taking by rote what the Treasury is setting down and not really putting any of the creativity and imagination that devolution, and devolution's specific tailoring to circumstances, was supposed to address.

Poverty

The rise of in-work poverty is a cause for deep concern. The proper regulation of zero-hour contracts is an important measure to begin to combat this. In 2015, nearly 1% of employees were not paid minimum wage. The Northern Ireland Executive should create a 'Fair Employment Enforcement Unit' within the Department of Finance, to ensure that all employees are paid a fair wage, and to ensure that workers are not exploited.

A Prosperous Economy

The legacy of the Troubles, major structural flaws and low productivity continue to present major challenges to the Northern Ireland economy. These manifest as continually high levels of economic inactivity, low wages, low levels of patent registration and low levels of company establishment compared to other parts of Ireland and other UK regions. The proposed exit from the European Union only compounds these problems and the region risks slipping into potential decades of stagnancy.

The SDLP welcomes the setting up of the new Department for the Economy but it is vital that it sets its ambition higher than the current Programme for Government Framework. These are focused primarily on Outcome 1, Outcome 5, Outcome 6 and Outcome 12 which are purely aspirational with no measures in place outline how the Department or Government will satisfy these outcomes.

There is an immediate need for a very specific set of outcomes, indicators and measures that specifically aim to offer stability to all economic stakeholders including potential foreign direct investors. The value of any evolving economic strategy will be reliant on this honest base, especially given the increased likelihood of recession.

The SDLP believes in a detailed economy & job creation strategy should form the central part of a Programme for Government and should be based around four central themes:

- A focus on job creation.
- Investment in further education & skills.
- Prioritising key economic sectors.
- Gaining control of more economic levers.

It is the responsibility of the Department to design and implement a strategy which develops and delivers increased employment, higher wages and reduced economic activity right across Northern Ireland. This should include all sectors including:

Agri-food sector

This sector's ambitious strategy for growth must be fully supported by the government. The possible removal of CAP support from farmers makes support for this sector all the more important. It provides much needed rural employment, income for farmers and also offers huge potential to expand our export market. The agri-food sector will be one of the most detrimentally impacted of all sectors by a Brexit with the introduction of tariffs and a curtailing of market access likely to damage profitability, employment and exports. As such the SDLP will continue to publish further proposals on this matter.

Northern Ireland Manufacturing Strategy

As a matter of urgency the Department must, with stakeholders, agree and implement a Northern Ireland Manufacturing Strategy. This must include a focus to develop 'factories for the future' which support innovation and ensures consumer focus.

Increase our level of exports - the Northern Ireland economy is too small to rely on domestic demand to stimulate adequate levels of economy activity. That is why a twin focus on attracting FDI and building robust export pathways is vital. Local Enterprise Agencies along with Invest NI need to co-ordinate efforts abroad. The impending uncertainly around any proposed exit from the European Union now poses a significant threat to the local economy. Cross-border economic co-ordination must be rapidly increased - this includes fostering strong links between Invest NI and the IDA, as well through UK and Ireland embassies and consulates abroad. Every possible avenue to expand exports and increased FDI must be fully utilised.

1. Increase skills, productivity and job market awareness - the gap between productivity here and elsewhere in Ireland and the UK still remains much larger than it should be. This impacts firm's competitiveness, their ability to add value to global supply chains and ultimately revenue and wages. The Department for the Economy must immediately prioritise a rapid improvement of productivity. In addition, it is vital that the department works with partners in schools and universities to ensure that pupils and students are aware of the wide range and rapidly changing nature of the job market.

2. Building our Tourism sector - this includes the immediate extension of the Wild Atlantic Way to include the Northern Ireland coastline and sectoral specific tax variance to stimulate trade.

3. Making Government work for Jobs – the financial priorities of the next NI Executive must be targeted at those areas which have the biggest benefit for the Northern Ireland economy. The Northern Ireland executive must ensure that funding is aimed towards sectors which deliver maximum value in terms of employment and infrastructure improvement.

4. Support for SMEs – Support for our Small and Medium Enterprises are vital for a flourishing economy with healthy job creation. SMEs must be able to operate in an environment which supports their growth by enhancing broadband provision across Northern Ireland.

5. NI Digital Coding Academy – The Northern Ireland Executive should establish a Digital Technology and Coding Academy, providing real-time and online coding and digital education for people of all ages across Northern Ireland. This should be accompanied by a new Digital Technology Strategy, linked with the Department of Education to ensure that coding and technology feature in all schools.

Investment in third level education and apprenticeships

It is clear that any economic strategy which is solely based on reducing the level of corporation tax will not work, especially since the wider UK rate looks likely to be reduced also. It is vital that the government prioritises investment in third level education and apprenticeships. This is the view of the SDLP but also of industry and academic experts.

The Government must immediately reverse the cuts currently being implemented in our two main universities. Northern Ireland has a lower per capita level of graduates than other parts of the UK. Any proposal to increase fees would only serve to discourage participation in third level education.

Investment must not however be solely limited to third level but must also include apprenticeships. Traditionally, the Northern Ireland Executive has underperformed in terms of apprenticeships and skills training. The Northern Ireland Executive must ensure greater co-operation between employers and our education system. Employer led apprenticeship models can directly address gaps in skills provision and ensure positions in employment are filled. The Northern Ireland Executive must enhance apprenticeships so they become an attractive alternative to further education and one that delivers sustainable employment.

Regional Economic Balance Bill

Over the last number of years, we have seen the emergence of a gross disparity in government support and investment across different regions of the North. This injustice must end. The Northern Ireland Executive must support legislation to ensure that investment across three areas – job support and promotion from Invest NI, regional infrastructure projects and education and training – is coordinated and targeted for areas and projects where it is required most urgently.

The Programme for Government should include commitments to create an Executive Subcommittee with strict targets for increased investment in areas which have been left behind. This will remove the unfair gaps in investment and end the attempt to economically repartition Northern Ireland.

A Just and safe community

This Assembly mandate must manifestly demonstrate a gear change in the delivery of public policy and the value of devolution. In Justice there is a baseline upon which good progress can be made. The ambition needs to be great as the needs are great. Elsewhere in this submission the SDLP outlines in legislative terms what that would look like.

Brexit – North and South

The changing circumstances with the Brexit vote have consequences for rights, justice and policing. Such issues are integral to membership of EU and other European institutions and consequently high vigilance is needed to guarantee that rights, justice and policing protections and arrangements continue to be in place.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. The Tory leadership in London makes clear its ambition to do damage to the ECHR. This is not an element of EU membership but vulnerable to collateral damage as the Brexiteers embark on their short-sighted enterprise. Similarly, there is enforcement of higher thresholds of environment and others standards through the EU mechanisms. Where now?

The need to hold to EU and ECHR standards and arrangements is common to all policy areas and equally acute when dealing with testing issues of rights, justice and policing.

Incitement

The evidence of current level of racism shows the need for not only a robust anti-racism strategy, a new immigrants and refugee strategy but it also calls forward new legislation on incitement to hatred to be informed by the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. This would also demonstrate the embracing of international standards not insular attitudes.

Prison Reform

A key feature and legacy of the previous mandate was prison failures and the need for prison reform. Patten and the particular contribution of the SDLP at all stages and levels demonstrated that the best threshold of reform and change can be achieved. Patten approach should have been deployed to prisons.

It is a serious and enduring fault line that individuals in various places and at different levels, have too often in the past and too much in the present, resist change.

The Minister and the Department have to demonstrate fully fledged support for the reform programme. There must be no hints of a go-slow or retreat. There has to be the full implementation of the Ower's Review and faithful adherence to CJI prison reviews.

Historical Abuse

The Executive Office has the lead on this issue but the issue crosses government departments. The failure of those who subscribed to the Framework PFG to properly shape this issue in that document was as badly judged as hurtful. The PfG must remedy the grave error.

This has a number of dimensions. First a firm commitment to accept and implement in tight timeframe the recommendations of the Hart inquiry due in early 2017.

Second explicit endorsement now of a financial redress scheme. Judge Hart has stated that it will be recommended. There should have been scoping of options for redress before now and an initial budget line should be in the 17/18 budget and budget lines in budgets for subsequent years. This should happen forthwith to give victims and survivors more confidence than is currently the case.

Third conclusion of and urgent Executive decisions on the two processes to make recommendations on inquiry into cases of clerical abuse and Mother and Child out with Hart.

Fourth ongoing and reasonable funding for victims and survivor groups. The fact that SAVIA received a 20% cut in its notional funding for the current financial year was a debilitating message from the Executive Office.

Legacy Inquests & Investigations

The SDLP has separately written to the Executive Office on the urgency of its agreement on a bid for new monies for the LCJ programme on legacy inquests. The failure to do so impedes the roll-out of this work in the Autumn.

In addition, monies must be released arising from the business case of the PONI to take forward cases and in respect of PSNI investigations into legacy deaths. This work cannot be held up by any interest using the absence of funding as leverage to address the Past on self-serving terms.

Organised Crime

A letter from the Director-General of the NCA to the Justice Committee confirmed that nine months after the NCA applied for new funding for its NI work, the NCA had received not a penny extra. Some say this is a technical issue. The SDLP say it is a political problem which raises the question-how come?

The work of addressing organised crime cannot be a victim of any technical or political problem. There are already too many doubts about the commitment to address crime. This mandate must see the paradigm shift necessary to once and for all face down organised crime, be it current or legacy.
This analysis is added to by the Executive response to the Panel that brought forward proposals to address paramilitarism. The Executive response has aspiration but little on decisive actions in real time never mind over time, with little on hard implementation and hard cash. There is the appearance of an Executive response for response sake.

Together with not a penny more for the NCA, the paradigm shift to confront paramilitarism and criminality is lacking and lacklustre.

Rights Based Approach

The SDLP in this commentary on Justice replicates the earlier commentary on a rights based approach. The nature and character of justice and policing must be informed by this approach. Its absence is in conflict with the outcomes of both.

Problem Solving

There is a political and wider consensus of the need for problem solving courts. This approach must be mainstreamed within the justice system in this mandate. To do so only highlights the need for a problem solving approach across the life of a citizen with early intervention and support from birth the twin track to a healthy person. In this regard, the Agnew Children's Services Co-Operation Act is a firm test of the outcomes based approach.

Lines of Demarcation

The SDLP has jealously guarded the lines of demarcation between the political and operational worlds on issues of law and justice. This was an article of faith in negotiation after negotiation, in proposal after proposal on policing, criminal justice, the NCA and Addressing the Past respectively. It remains so. We will resist any new government or political attempt to remodel or revise a policing, justice, oversight, rights or legacy structure that attempts to do so.

A Healthy and thriving society

The SDLP believes that the Programme for Government (PfG) must commit 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.

It is important to remember that during the last mandate some of our major hospitals such as the Royal Victoria, were said to be 'at breaking point' and were forced to declare a 'major incident' to manage the backlog of patients.

Currently 400,000 people are on waiting lists which are at their longest in 15 years and the number of patients waiting over 12 hours at emergency departments in Northern Ireland more than doubled during 2015.

The SDLP also believe strongly that any measurement of the performance of the Health Service must not take as its benchmark, a system that is already under huge stress. A comprehensive feedback mechanism for patients (as per Patient Opinion in England) – would also drive service improvement and reduces 'complaints' workload.

Transforming Your Care

While the SDLP are supportive of the intentions behind Transforming Your Care, it has become apparent however that despite the ambitious proposals published in 2011 in Transforming your Care that our health service is under ever increasing strain.

Five years on from TYCs publication we have a community healthcare infrastructure which is under-resourced and ill-equipped. The recent crises experienced in our Accident and Emergency Departments and elective care have been a result of this.

While it was proposed that TYC was to be completed within three to five years of its publication (between 2014 and 2016) it is notable that approximately 50% of its recommendations have yet to be

realised. It is also notable that the proposed time frame to implement the remaining recommendations will run parallel to the proposed lengthy process for the formation of the Programme for Government. As such with regards to health the proposed PfG process is, at the outset, flawed.

General Practice

General practice is the first point of contact for 90% of health and social care related needs and the last decade has seen a sharp growth in demand for GP services. Total consultations rose from 7.2 million in 2003/04 to 12.7 million in 2013/2014 – 6.6 consultations per patient per year or an increase in overall consultations per patient of 63% from 2003/04 to 2013/14.

These 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. This is particularly evident in rural areas where we have seen young doctors choosing not to enter general practice and experienced GPs are choosing to leave the sector. The number of GP practices in Northern Ireland 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.

There is a clear and demonstrable need for immediate action to ensure the sustainability of general practice in Northern Ireland. One such act would be to establish a medical school in the North West to address regional imbalance and increase the number of GP training places to at least 111 per annum with a view to increasing the number of full time equivalent GPs in Northern Ireland to 400 by 2020. Accompanying this a comprehensive cost of service budget must be put in place for community pharmacies to enable a more central role for them.

These urgent reforms must include a fair and well-deserved consolidated pay-rise for our nursing and other medical staff, ensure the protection of working conditions and introduce fair rate of pay for independent care providers and provide a career structure to develop their skills.

The SDLP believe that the failure to strengthen community care and the reduction of Accident and Emergency services in tandem, have been significant factors in the unacceptably long waiting lists being faced by patients.

Access to treatments

The SDLP believe that the PfG must also address removing barriers that prevent people accessing treatment. This includes the location of services but also the availability of particular drugs and programmes. As such we call for the creation of a single point of accredited advice and information, the development of a strategy for treating and supporting young people with Autism which includes funding for the Autism Act 2011, a targeted reduction in the waiting times for MS diagnosis and treatment, a reduction of the age limit for cervical cancer screening and the extension of the HPV vaccination programme to include teenage boys, the creation of a Specialist Drugs Fund, ensuring screening for Group B Strep is offered to all pregnant women.

Mental health Provision

Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental ill-health than any other region of these islands. It is estimated that one in four adults here will suffer from a mental health problem at some stage in their life.

A research project undertaken by the Commission for Victims and Survivors and Ulster University found that a staggering 213,000 of the people in Northern Ireland suffer from some sort of mental illness and that almost half of these are directly related to the Troubles.

The SDLP believe that this is an area enquiring 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. As such the PfG should establish the process and remit of appointing a Mental Health Champion; and target Zero Suicide.

Preventative Spending and Public Health

The SDLP believes that the pattern of spending in health and social care has focused too heavily on short term fixes and crises alleviation.

Northern Ireland has the highest infant and child mortality rates in these islands and is one of the worst performing countries in Europe. Similarly, our lack of an adequately resourced Early Year Strategy results in poorer lifelong opportunities for our young and results in interventions in later years which place an increased demand on public expenditure later in life.

Evidence suggests that preventative spending programmes can not only provide a social return on investment but also save the public purse further costs in the medium to long term. The SDLP believe that the PfG must establish a cross departmental ring-fenced prevention and early intervention budget to tackle areas including but not limited to health awareness and education, pre-natal and early years programmes, alcohol, prescription and illegal substance abuse, adaptations to homes for older people and people with additional needs, heating, lifestyle and nutritional awareness.

North-south healthcare

The SDLP is committed to ensuring an all island approach to health and social care to ensure the maximising of resources and provide the highest level of treatment.

The SDLP recognise the benefits that North-South working provides for economic co-operation, political co-operation and reconciliation. We have seen the benefit of a joined-up approach to paediatric cardiac surgery, by working with the Health Minister in the South our children with urgent heart surgery requirements will no longer have to travel overseas.

Furthermore, we believe in increasing provisions for North-South Healthcare including a joined-up approach to ambulance service provision in the border areas. However, we note with alarm that there has to date been no mention, provision or contingency for continuance of North south arrangements in light of the result of the recent referendum on membership of the European Union.

A Strategic approach to Infrastructural Development

After enduring several lost decades of underfunding and neglect, communities across Northern Ireland have been left with inadequate infrastructure provision. This impacts on both people's quality of life, the attractiveness of an area to investors and the prosperity of the region.

Northern Ireland needs to adopt a comprehensive and sustainable strategic investment programme. Quality infrastructure supports businesses, improves productivity and allows an equitable development for all part of Northern Ireland.

The SDLP are calling for a specific PfG commitment to a Strategic Infrastructure Development which would include:

- Work with local government and Councils to ensure that roads, water, communications and energy infrastructure are provided soonest where they are needed most and that underdeveloped areas are unlocked so that they may grow and take advantage of local assets.

- Invest in infrastructure projects that would have both a Northern Ireland wide impact as well as benefitting local communities.

- Develop a unified and streamlined process for preparation, procurement and provision.

- Centre on ensuring a fair regional balance, particularly in relation to investment in infrastructure and inward investment. Any investment needs to be co-ordinated and targeted for areas and projects where it is most urgently required.

- A 20-year strategy to improve connectivity across Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and across the two islands.

Regeneration and unlocking potential

The Executive must work with local government to ensure that infrastructure deficits are addressed to allow for regeneration of our cities and industrial areas. This must take into account both foci of population but also the hinterland of urban centres.

The NI Investment Fund should be advanced as a vehicle to leverage funding, with clarity provided on government project priorities. There must be concrete plans to utilise the full potential of Financial Transactions Capital, a clear access route for the private sector must be facilitated, working together with government departments to ensure that suitable schemes are developed and implemented within specified timeframes.

The redevelopment of our greenways and waterways represents a unique opportunity for community orientated infrastructural development. Such development will help build sustainable tourism such as walking, cycling and water based pursuits while delivering jobs in construction, hospitality and tourism.

Connectivity

The SDLP believe that the PfG must include a dedicated transport strategy to tackle congestion and improve accessibility. This plan must invest in strategic transport infrastructure, including maintaining and upgrading roads, rail and ports to build a strong and regionally balanced economy. In terms of roads, the SDLP wants to see:

- The priority completion of the A5 and A6 and major improvement of the Northern Ireland side of the A4/N16 between Enniskillen and Sligo.
- A renewed focus on the delivery of the Narrow Water Bridge accompanied by a major upgrade of the road between Newry and Downpatrick to unlock the multi-sectoral potential of the Mournes.
- A Ballynahinch bypass as well as a dedicated link road from the M1 to the A1 at Lisburn to allow Belfast – Dublin traffic to move uninterrupted by the congested Sprucefield junction.

Political reform

It is noteworthy that despite the need to take a strategic and cohesive approach to developing our infrastructure, the few projects that have been identified to date have arrived through a variety of parallel and differing processes. The proposals for the PfG are silent on reform of political structures in areas with a direct connection with the commissioning, procurement and delivery of infrastructural projects. The length of time taken to complete the procurement process must also be addressed as neighbouring jurisdictions often appear to develop projects at a much quicker rate.

The difficulties encountered in the delivery of strategic projects demonstrate that a new procurement and delivery agency is necessary. This model is used elsewhere, most notably in the Republic of Ireland where the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) has oversight of the procurement of key infrastructure projects.

Regional Balance and linkages

It is disappointing that the draft Programme for Government is largely silent on the issue of regional underinvestment with the sole stated measure to monitor commuting times to established 'major centres of employment' (and notably silent on addressing previous underfunding which has prevented such centres of employment from emerging). Further investment in our public transport infrastructure is required to improve journey times and safety standards between key cities in Northern Ireland such as Derry, Newry, Armagh and others.

Energy security and communications links remains a barriers to the expansion of businesses and costs and poor linkages continue to negatively affect homes across Northern Ireland. We want to develop a long term strategy that provides new investment and delivers competitive prices. New barriers to development or burdens upon the consumer must also be resisted e.g. water charges.

A 20-year strategy

The Programme for Government has an opportunity to develop a rolling 20-year strategy to be coterminous with the next 4 cycles of the Republic's Capital Investment Plan. This plan should build upon the urgent work required within Northern Ireland by harmonising infrastructure across the island of Ireland. A bespoke strand of this development to improve connectivity and ensure security of access to continental Europe is also urgently required, more so in light of the recent result of the EU membership

referendum. This would involve connecting our domestic infrastructure with international transit points such as our harbours and airports.

Department of Education

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. Years of flawed Ministerial leadership has left a complicated, fragmented education system which fails too many of our young people, many of whom leave school lacking acceptable numeracy and literacy skills.

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.

The PfG must commit to improving our education system, and provide specific, measurable targets to do so. Below are specific areas the Programme for Government must commit to improve:

Curriculum

A key aspect of any vibrant and successful education system is a modern curriculum. Initially, there must be a comprehensive review of primary and post-primary curricula to ensure that what is being taught in our classrooms is relevant to modern life.

Our young people should continue to study numeracy and mathematics until they are aged 18, within or in addition to the current qualifications regime. The requirement to study a modern language to GCSE should be reinstated with a greater emphasis on learning languages at a younger age when a greater linguistic capacity can be influenced.

The vocational education sector must be developed, enshrining the ethos that 'every job is a good job' and allowing our children to follow a career path suitable to them and embrace the contribution they will make to society through it.

Numeracy and Literacy

There must be better literacy and numeracy outcomes for the many young people who leave schools with huge deficits in these areas. Initially, the PfG must commit to publishing an updated literacy and numeracy strategy, aimed at tackling the root causes of educational underachievement which often lie in social deprivation. A cross-sectorial strategy involving teachers, parents, siblings, wider family and volunteers is a key way to improve standards in these areas and should be encouraged.

From STEM to STEAM

There needs to be a step-change from a focus on STEM to a focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), meaning a recognition and understanding that Arts subjects provide many vital skills. As well as ensuring that STEM subjects are on the curriculum from primary school, the Northern Irish Executive must ensure that arts subjects play a vital role in curriculum design.

Academic Selection

Since the "abolition" of the 11 plus in 2008, aimed at reducing the impact and stress that children face, they are now forced to sit up to five exams instead of the previous two. The SDLP does not support

academic selection at 11 but the current situation cannot be allowed to continue. This programme for Government must commit to finding a way to resolve this issue.

Early Years

The PfG must commit to bespoke, robust legislation for under 6s- an Early Education and Care Act. The first years of a child's life are where the foundations are laid and lifelong paths are established. These formative years go on to have multiple impacts on health, educational achievements and opportunities and it is vital that every child has the highest level of support.

A statutory basis for the financing, supervision and coordination of the delivery of all education and care services by the voluntary, community and statutory sectors has been one of the long-standing calls by the sector, and the Northern Irish Executive must provide this.

The Programme for Government must provide a strategy to intervene on the annual impact of Nursery Places. Consideration should be given to a re-evaluation of the entry criteria so that it better reflects the needs of children.

Childcare

The Department for Education has placed an insufficient focus on pre-school childcare, and the affordability of pre-school childcare. This Programme for Government must commit to increasing the amount of free childcare available to parents to 30 hours per week.

To get to the point of 30 hours free childcare, the initial step should be to increase the minimum amount of free pre-school childcare from 12.5 hours per week to 20 hours per week, with a view to further increasing it to 30 hours. As well as reducing the direct cost of childcare to families, this removes a key barrier for those seeking work or training and benefits the entire economy.

Capacity is a big issue, both in terms of physical infrastructure and staffing. We also need to ensure that we have the correct levels of staff with appropriate training.

In addition, childcare oversight is fragmented. A common approach to funding, inspection, regulation, access to support, ratios etc. all informed by UN articles and sustainable development goals.

Special Needs Education

We must see a greater emphasis on those with special needs. They must be treated equally and be provided with the same opportunities to learn as those in mainstream schools. The Programme for Government must ensure greater work is undertaken to connect mainstream and special schools. There should be opportunities for shared learning and programmes that encourage integration as well as bespoke learning. There must be an immediate return to the full day nursery provision for those with special needs and enable them to receive a compressive pre-school education.

Youth Services

Young people need to have appropriate opportunities to be involved in structured activities that compliment and assist their education and development. Youth Services can play a key role in delivering this. We should see capacity for a return to Youth Services being a place young people can enjoy, develop and flourish and not simply being a crude instrument for social engineering or meeting of targets.

The PfG should commit to a review of the services provided in Northern Ireland with a greater emphasis on the voluntary sector who often deliver better value for money through the attraction of grants and funds. There should also be a review of the levels of bureaucracy within youth services to ensure those employed within the sector are directing their skills and talents to young people and not targets.

Shared Education

We must allow our children to be offered the opportunity to be educated together. Learning separately, living separately and socialising separately are not mechanism to build a shared Northern Ireland. Our children must be educated to understand that it is important to be tolerant with those you identify as different, and equipped with the skills to be open to those of other cultures, traditions and backgrounds.

Teacher Training

The SDLP acknowledges the challenges facing teacher training, the uncertain access to work of new graduates and the need to assess best models for the future. That said the SDLP reiterates that the continued existence of St Mary's University College, in each of its teacher training, liberal arts and professional training sectors, must continue to be secured. Reasons include the imperative to invest in areas of disadvantage not least when job strategy in Belfast seeks to concentrate new jobs in the Queens-Titanic/Harbour corridor. Indeed, the SDLP believe that as St Mary's is a centre of acknowledged excellence its role can grow to spread the benefit of its excellence.

Education provision

There is a rich diversity of education provision in Northern Ireland. Each sector has common and different strengths. Each sector must be valued and each have the support to develop its model evident in various initiatives including that of Christian Churches around faith-based provision.

The PfG must include commitments to continuing and enhancing the current shared education work. Shared education must become a core requirement of all schools. Areas should be prioritised and the work targeted to those that need it most.

A comfortable and confident Community

The Department for Communities is one which is of vital importance, covering many areas which are integral to the lives of every resident of Northern Ireland. The 2011-2015 Programme for Government promised to tackle poverty and social exclusion in multiple ways, but it failed. This Programme for Government must set ambitious targets to achieve real change in the following areas:

Housing and Homelessness:

Communities flourish when people have good quality, warm, comfortable homes to live in. Despite challenging economic times and cuts to budgets, we must pave the way for a real acceleration of future new housing to help close the gap between need and supply.

Housing is an enabler to a 'good life' – it is fundamental. It is believed that unless housing need is specifically articulated in the Programme for Government, it may be taken for granted. People should be able to live in high quality sustainable homes that they can afford and that meet their needs.

- The Regional Development Strategy suggests that 11,200 homes should be built each year to meet housing need, but since 2011, less than 6000 houses a year have been completed. This Government must seek to tackle the longest waiting list on record. The target for new build houses must be increased, and of this, at least 3000 social homes should be built each year – targeted at the areas with greatest social need.

- The system of housing allocation must continue to operate on the basis of objective housing need. The most vulnerable must be protected and prioritised, and housing allocations must continue to be made under the principle of fairness and equality.
- Housing Associations are the only providers of new social and shared ownership homes in NI. They have told us that they are ready to build new homes and that finance is available. The problem is lack of availability of land. A cross departmental strategy should be developed to identify available land in areas of high housing need. The acquisition of land in target areas will help to reduce the amount of people on housing waiting lists and in housing stress in areas of high need.
- We believe that both shared housing and mixed tenure housing developments are required to ensure an inclusive, socially cohesive society. Work must be done to tackle segregation with shared future and new build housing schemes as well as shared neighbourhood strategies in existing developments.
- Housing waiting lists indicate that there are not enough new houses being built to meet housing need. There is an appetite for more affordable houses to be built, to help people make their way onto the housing ladder.
- The Savills Report said that the 30 year cost of investment (including repairs) would be £6.7 billion for Commonly Adopted Standard or £1.5bn for 5 years from 15/16. The Northern Irish Executive must take this under consideration and outline how they plan to meet this need.

Poverty

Currently, 1 in 5 people are in living in poverty. Poverty is one of the single greatest challenges facing our society. Everyone deserves to grow up free from the threat of poverty and with better life chances and opportunity than the generation before them. All parties should commit to putting this issue above politics and to dealing with it as a matter of urgency. We believe that this process needs to be integrated with hard proposals otherwise it can be easily degraded. A repeat of previous Executive performance cannot be tolerated by any political party.

Fuel Poverty

The Northern Ireland Executive must commit to eradicating fuel poverty in the North. The Northern Irish Executive must ensure that this is a priority. In 2015, 33% of houses were deemed to be in fuel poverty, this should be dramatically reduced in the upcoming mandate. Any strategy or plan must include targets of substantially reducing fuel poverty. We need a system which both proactively contacts those at risk of fuel poverty, but also ensures that those who need advice and information are able to receive it through a single point of access. A Fuel poverty taskforce should be established, bringing together experts, independents and the department to update the current fuel poverty programme, to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Child Poverty

The Child Poverty Strategy was delivered two years late. The Executive has failed to deliver for people living in poverty. The previous Programme for Government committed to reducing child poverty, yet the latest figures show that 28% of children in Northern Ireland were living in poverty in 2014/15, an increase of 22,000 children in two years. Every child deserves to grow up free from the threat of poverty and with better life chances and opportunities than the generation before them. The Northern Ireland Executive must commit to, and follow through on, substantially reducing child poverty.

Social Responsibility and Welfare

The process for dealing with Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland needs to be remodelled. We believe that a Welfare Reform Committee should be established, to run alongside any further proposed changes to Welfare Reform which come from Westminster. This committee would ensure that the Westminster Government will not have the power to implement welfare changes without taking the situation in Northern Ireland into account.

Culture and Sport

Culture and sports can break down barriers between communities and different demographics to help us build stronger communities. They also can play a key role in tackling inequality, building aspiration and supporting the economy. Tackling social isolation must be a key priority, and sports has the potential of bringing people of all ages together.

Year on year, culture and arts are hit with budget cuts. And in the last mandate, the culture Minister failed to pass any legislation to help the sector.

To ensure that this important part of Northern Ireland society it kept on the agenda, the Northern Ireland Executive must form a subcommittee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and create and introduce a new Culture and Arts Strategy.

Libraries

Northern Ireland's public libraries play an important role in our local communities by enhancing learning and ensuring access to information to everyone; improving literacy skills; acting as a social space; creating employment and helping to develop partnerships with statutory and community organisations. Work must be done to ensure that services are not disintegrated in local communities, especially in rural areas.

Broadcasting

Broadcasting is a reserved issue, an issue that the UK Government currently have power over. These powers should be devolved to Northern Ireland. This will be a major change to the broadcasting and regulatory environment, involving negotiations with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, as well as Ofcom. The Northern Irish Executive must engage to find a suitable way for Northern Ireland to have power over broadcasting, so that they are fully considered in the development of broadcasting policy. Initially, an Independent Advisory Panel should be established to explore the potential for devolution as well as addressing and dealing with these issues.

Growing Rural areas

The SDLP believe that farming and agriculture is the economic backbone of rural communities and as such, the Programme for Government must focus on sustainable family based farming.

Brexit

The result of the EU Referendum has opened a gulf of uncertainty for the new Programme for Government, particularly in relation to our agriculture sector. It's difficult to see how the Programme for Government can fail to include preparations for the UK leaving the EU. This should include reviewing existing legislation and regulations, and aim to replace current EU funding for programmes linked to DAERA. Specifically, in relation to Agriculture, we ensure the replacement of Pillar 1 Direct Payments of EU Common Agricultural Policy.

Rural Development

Promote equal and fair access to public services, transportation and high speed broadband and ensure rural protection policies are enforced across the nine new departments. The PfG should prioritise the review of the focus of the Rural Development Programme and ensure funding.

Basic Payment Scheme

The Programme for Government should include plans to review the Basic Payment Scheme to deal with interim concerns including definition of an "active" farmer, possible details of any "greening" requirements, application forms and the take-up of digital services, inspections, and the issuing of final payments.

Independent Environment Agency

The PfG should include specific targets for the creation of an all island independent environment agency co-operating with other sectors on the operation of environmental regulations and policy.

Agri-food sector

The PfG must include proactive actions aimed at reducing barriers to expansion of sector. The Northern Irish Executive must continue to support our agri-food and farming industries through investment plans and employment strategies. Removing barriers to our agri-food sector and delivering a Fair Deal for Farming will ensure that targets are met.

The Northern Ireland Executive must support the industry through polices that seek to reduce energy costs, encourage skills development and competitively promote the North's food and drink sector. The

PfG should include targets to develop and introduce a dedicated Northern Ireland food strategy and marketing board.

Farming

A priority for the PfG must be to establish a Fairer Farming Deal between farming communities and the Executive to support farmers, challenge power imbalances and deliver fairness.

There must be a press for a more flexible approach to financial arrangements between farmers and banks that takes into account the volatility of the international market and the seasonal nature of profitability.

Farm Business Expansion Scheme

Renewed campaign which seeks to positively engage with DARD to ensure a comprehensive package which seeks to produce economically viable farming.

Fisheries

Strong commitment to the protection of fisheries and the fishing industry and seek to develop a comprehensive fishing development plan for onshore fish processing industry. We need the devolution of fishery policy and the development of coastal communities and action plans is vital.

The PfG should aim to protect our coastlines, initially by mapping coastal erosion across the North, introducing a new Northern Ireland Coastline Strategy, and expanding the role and support for the Coastal Erosion taskforce.

Contamination of Beef Products

EFRA ran an extensive inquiry into the food contamination following the discovery of horse and pig DNA in a number of frozen and processed beef products on sale in the UK market. Having a Northern Ireland voice on the committee was vital to defend the high standards of production in Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland, and also represent the strong relations between the North and South. She stood up for the local industry and local producers as they came under fire from other MPs looking for an easy scapegoat over the cause of the scandal.

Farm gate Prices

The current situation in farming, particularly in the beef and dairy sectors, is very concerning and indeed threatens the viability and sustainability of family farming enterprises as we have traditionally known them in Northern Ireland.

In order to sustain farming in the future the farmer needs to get a better price at the farm gate for dairy and the animals going to slaughter. The Northern Ireland Executive must be proactive and deal effectively with these issues in order to protect our farming industry without further delay.

All Island Labelling

In recent years' food products in the North have faced difficulty in labelling regulations that do not recognise them as Northern Irish or Irish. The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland produce is best served when it can reflect its unique nature. It is only natural that food grown in Cavan be treated the same as food grown in Tyrone. The Northern Ireland Executive must seek to develop a One Island Label that recognises Ireland as a unique region within Europe and unique produce of quality.

Nomadic Livestock

Linking to all island labelling, is the issue of nomadic livestock. There should be no reason that cattle in the North who are then transferred across the border to the South, or vice versa should lose value. The Northern Ireland Executive must resolve this issue and ensure that there is no price penalty.