

LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANIFESTO 2014

THINKING NATIONALLY ACTING LOCALLY

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THINKING NATIONALLY **ACTING** LOCALLY

IRISH UNITY

- » Sinn Féin is an Irish republican party. We are a United Ireland party. We are an all-Ireland Party. We believe in sovereignty, independence and equality.
- » Partition separated town lands, communities and regions. It undermined economic development and imposed additional costs for public services across Ireland. Partition never did and never will make sense.
- » We are the only party with a strategy and policies for achieving Irish unity and independence. We are the only party bringing a distinctly republican and socialist analysis into the heart of Irish politics.
- » All Sinn Féin elected representatives will continue to pursue Equality, Change and Irish Unity at local government.

Sinn Féin is committed to:

- » Achieving Irish Unity through peaceful and democratic means.
- » Securing a Border Poll to allow the people to have their say on the future
- » Addressing the legacy of partition and promoting national reconciliation.
- » Building All Ireland and Cross Border Co-operation
- » Partition fractured the economy of Ireland and in particular the border counties. With vision and determination we can build a sustainable and equal economy across Ireland. Realising that vision requires the full and active participation of elected representatives at local government, Assembly and Oireachtas.
- » Harmonising structures across the island will deliver benefits for all communities, workers and business.
- » The communities along the border continue to pay the cost of partition with reduced investment, high unemployment, emigration and disjointed public services.
- » Councils along the Border provide back-to-back services that could be provided in a more efficient and effective manner through cross border working between councils.
- » Sinn Féin is contesting and will win seats in all councils along the border. We are the only party that can deliver greater co-operation and integration along the border.

Sinn Féin is committed to:

- » Promoting a Border Development zone to tackle barriers to trade and investment and promoting co-operation in public services for the benefit of all the people;
- » Greater access to EU funding and supports such as INTERREG and other European cross border funding;
- » Increasing cross-border co-operation at local government level through the implementation of memorandums of understanding between council areas for the provision of joint services and economic development;
- » Connecting Councils throughout Ireland to share and develop best practice in public services and economic development;
- » Harmonising health, education, transport, infrastructure and access to employment along the border and across Ireland;
- » Enhancing cross border trade and economic activity by supporting small and medium enterprises, building tourism and recreation, supporting agriculture and food processing and green initiatives, such as renewable energy and low carbon projects;
- » The coordination of strategic planning of roads, ports, rail and air services;
- » Continuing our opposition to the HGV levy;
- » Supporting enterprise agencies to enhance and develop cross-border trade, skills, job creation and economic development;
- » Building the capacity of private sector firms to access funding for joint ventures or cross-border marketing support, notably under INTERREG and the two Peace programmes;
- » Support community, voluntary and economic organisations to develop cross-border projects.

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- » Sinn Féin understands the importance of delivering services to everyone through the most appropriate structure. To that end our public representatives work effectively in the institution that they are elected to and also work collaboratively with all other institutions to impact positively upon the lives of those that we serve.
 - » Sinn Féin councillors are an integral part of the wider Sinn Féin team in Councils, in the Assembly, Dáil, Westminster and the European Parliament. That joint approach ensures effective delivery for the communities we serve. Local citizens can be assured of a strong 'Team Sinn Féin' approach to their concerns from highly committed and motivated representatives.

Review of Public Administration (RPA)

Local Government changes

- » Sinn Féin promoted and supported the amalgamation of the current 26 local council authorities into 11 larger councils and the transferring of additional powers from Executive departments to the new councils. This will see the most significant shake-up in local government since the 1970s.
- » The new councils will gain significant additional new powers including:
 - Planning,
 - Community Planning,
 - Local economic development, urban regeneration/Neighborhood Renewal, and a new power of 'General Competence', providing Councils with the power to develop innovative approaches to addressing issues affecting their area.
- » This decentralisation and democratisation of power provides the opportunity for local authorities in the six-counties to deliver current and additional services to citizens in a more responsive, and efficient manner.
- » Equality, representation and the accountability of local authorities is central to this. Sinn Féin will ensure that all positions of responsibility will be allocated on the basis of d'Hondt, and that all councillors will be subject to a Code of Conduct and a Code of Ethics, with a Commissioner for Complaints adjudicating on any alleged breaches.
- » Given the wider geographical areas that Councils will be responsible for Sinn Féin will seek to establish a number of 'One Stop Shops' to ensure that, citizens and your elected representatives have greater accessibility to services which are delivered more efficiently.
- » Sinn Féin will continue to engage with Executive Departments to gain additional powers and responsibilities to for local government. We will always strive to deliver local services in a manner which meets the challenges of the increasing needs and demands of local rate-payers/regulator for waste collection services.



COMMUNITY PLANNING & EMPOWERMENT

- » Sinn Féin supports the new Community Planning powers under RPA as a measure for the greater empowerment of citizens. For the first time Statutory agencies will be required to sit around the Community Planning table with members of the Community and Voluntary sectors and elected representatives to identify, plan and prioritise the real needs of local areas. Community Planning powers, for the first time, provide local people with the opportunity to participate within the democratic processes of defining what is best for local areas. Much more positive partnership working can occur between councils, citizens and the statutory agencies in deciding on the range of services and how they will be delivered within local areas.
- » Sinn Fein councilors will provide closer working arrangements and coordination between `local` and `central` government to deliver for the citizens we all serve. There should be no constraints upon partnership working. The Statutory Partnership Panel will see local government representatives from the six-counties meeting regularly with the relevant Stormont Executive Ministers regularly to examine and improve upon central-local delivery.
- » Community Planning allows for local areas to define the needs of their area, agree priorities, and to plan and to lobby for the resources to deliver those needs. This can only benefit local areas. Community Planning powers will provide for much greater and integrated cross-border partnerships between local authorities north and south.



THE ECONOMY & JOB CREATION

- » Sinn Féin believes citizens' needs and prosperity should be put at the heart of the economy. The economy should serve society, not the other way round. Employment, education and training must be seen as rights. We are also conscious of the resources that many people currently contribute but which are not currently measured by modern economies, such as housework, child rearing, caring and volunteering.
- » Sinn Féin believes the Partition of Ireland does not make sense politically or economically. Two distinct economic systems have failed the citizens of Ireland.
- » People have a right to work, a right to earn a living and a right to provide for their families. At local government, Sinn Féin will make job creation our number one priority. We believe that the development of an all-Ireland economic recovery plan is essential. This must be the basis for growing a sustainable, long-term economy alongside sustained improvements in equality.
- » Sinn Féin believe that we can create sustainable jobs, and by doing so give our youth the opportunity to work and build a future here. Sinn Féin is committed to standing up for Ireland, ensuring the needs of local people and communities are met. Providing jobs for people is central to that.

Sinn Féin will use the new powers devolved to Councils to:

- » Ensure that regeneration is at the heart of economic development;
- » Zone for commerce and industry in a way that will attract new jobs and investment;
- » Ensure more resources are directed towards cultural tourism and locally based tourist projects that will help create jobs, particularly in disadvantaged communities;
- » Direct more resources into the Arts, to create jobs in the creative industries.
- » This approach will be enhanced by our collaboration with our Executive Ministers and Assembly members who will;
- » Further build the decentralisation of public sector jobs initiated by our Minister Michelle O'Neill;
- » Ensure more support is made available for small and medium business sectors, and for the social economy sector, including tax breaks/incentives and consideration of enterprise zones;
- » Further develop the potential of the All-Ireland Agri-Food sector and ensure the implementation of the Going for Growth strategy which has the potential to create 15,000 new jobs;
- » Fight for the harmonisation of all-Ireland taxation and regulation policies;
- » Ensure all capital and services contracts contain social clauses.



AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural communities are the heart of Ireland; they are and always will be the backbone of Irish society. So we must work to protect, enhance and support them. We must continue to protect the most vulnerable in our rural communities. That is why Sinn Féin Ministers have invested £26 million into tackling rural poverty and isolation by increasing rural transport, increasing rural childcare places, tackling fuel poverty, providing access to mains water and tackling the lack of rural broadband. By the end of next year, they will have invested £500 million into rural development in the six counties, growing rural businesses, developing rural tourism and creating rural jobs. Sinn Féin has set out a pathway to recovery for rural Ireland. We have demonstrated our commitment to rural communities and will continue to deliver in the years to come. Sinn Féin will stand up for rural Ireland!

At Council level Sinn Féin will:

- » Use its Planning Powers to ensure that we have vibrant sustainable rural communities;
- » Take a sympathetic approach to rural dwellers seeking to remain within the countryside as they build new family homes;
- » Ensure that Community Planning delivers the services that are needed to maintain a vibrant rural community;
- » Ensure that, within Zoning powers, we allow for the development of rural businesses;
- » Work with rural communities to identify appropriate potential tourist and visitor projects.

At Executive and Assembly level we will:

- » Protect the rights of farmers in the severely disadvantaged areas;
- » Seek improvements to the payments and inspection regime for Single Farm Payments moving towards part payments and faster payments for all farmers;
- » Work for a thriving and sustainable fishing industry and grow the aquaculture sector;
- » Work to ensure complete rural broadband coverage, including assisting farmers with on-line management and diversification;
- » Ensure the implementation of the Going for Growth strategy to realise its potential for creating 15,000 new jobs.



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- » Sinn Féin will continue to fight for the rights of the people on this island in terms of regional development. Sinn Féin Councilors will:
- » Use new Planning Powers to zone areas of land to attract regional development;
- » Work with adjacent Councils north and south to plan and develop regional infrastructure and services for the betterment of the whole community;
- » Explore with the European Investment Bank the potential for funding for local projects which have a regional significance;
- » Continue to lobby the Executive and the Irish Government to address regional inequalities in infrastructure – particularly through pushing for the upgrade of major strategic projects such as the A5, A6/Dungiven By-pass and

At Executive and Assembly level we will:

- » Work to ensure additional investment to be delivered to sustainable public transportation in both bus and railway services;
- » Continue to block the introduction of separate household water charges and the privatisation of the water service;
- » Promote and encourage active travel aiming to achieve a modal shift to cycling and walking;
- » Continue to recognise the centrality of the construction industry to the overall economy of the island;
- » Work with our MEP to ensure we identify Regional Aid funding opportunities.



EDUCATION

- » Sinn Féin education minister John O'Dowd is bringing about an improved pupil-centered education system in the North, putting pupils first and looking at education in a social context. Sinn Féin councillors will:
- » Work with parents to help ensure access for their children to their school of choice;
- » Work to support local school principals and members of Boards of Governors to ensure that they have the necessary resources to deliver a proper education service to our children;
- » Challenge, where appropriate, where we see our education system failing our children;
- » Work with local communities to identify and lobby for appropriate educational services to meet the needs of our children.
- » Sinn Féin Councillors will also work with the Sinn Féin Education Minister to:
- » Support a pupil-centered approach which has seen a 10% improvement in educational attainment over the past decade with 62% of our young people now achieving five GCSE's Grades A - C;
- » Ensure the retention of the Education and Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and the freeze on student fees;
- » Continue to seek crucial supports for young people from low-income families such as the repeated expansion of Free School Meals and School Uniform grants criteria which will benefit around 100,000 families this year.
- » Oppose cuts in vital front-line education services, and ensure additional investment in schools and children with high socio-economic needs;
- » Continue to promote and support the unprecedented level of investment in Irish Medium education and seek increased resources for the sector to redress generational disadvantage and discrimination;



EQUALITY

- » Sinn Féin is committed to Building an Ireland of Equals where everyone's rights are guaranteed, free of divisions caused by partition, sectarianism, racism and other forms of discrimination, and free from poverty and economic inequality. The republican vision is about building of 'An Ireland of Equals'. It is at the core of our agenda for change. For this reason we need a new type of politics based on inclusion, equality and fairness

In Council Sinn Féin are committed to:

- » Ensuring equality based rights and policies are central to both the delivery of services to the citizen and to the administration practices within the new councils;
- » Challenging and reversing the patterns of discrimination and structural inequalities which exist across Council areas;
- » Ensuring that people with disabilities have full and proper access to all Council facilities and services;
- » Ensuring that Councils introduce effective anti-racist, anti-bullying and anti-homophobic policies and initiatives;
- » Ensuring that local councils promote equality, fairness and well-being;
- » Confronting inequality and sectarianism as a prerequisite to developing good relations.

At Executive and Assembly level we will:

- » Prioritise the protection of vulnerable older people;
- » Work with the LGBT community to fight for legislation to permit and recognise same-sex marriage and equal recognition of all civil partnerships in law;
- » Introduce an all-Ireland 'Strategy for Women's Equality';
- » Ensure that the unionist community is included at the centre of the debate about the kind of Ireland we collectively want and their place within a united Ireland;
- » Seek to increase voter participation by holding elections at weekends;
- » Officially recognise Travelling people as an ethnic minority deserving of protection;
- » Continue to lobby and work for a referendum on Irish unity.



IRISH LANGUAGE, CULTURE, ART & LEISURE

- » Sinn Féin along with Culture Minister Caral NíChuilín are driving a range of political strategies in relation to the Irish language, new sports stadia, and the development of a positive and effective approach to the decade of centenaries now upon us. One example of this is the successful Líofa project which has already encouraged over 6000 people from all walks of life across the North to become fluent in Irish by 2015.

Council Sinn Féin are committed to:

- » Encouraging all new councils to put in place their own comprehensive Irish Language policies to advance and promote the use and visibility of the Irish Language within the council areas;
- » Investment in sport and leisure facilities;
- » Developing increased quality sporting provision and services for all minority groups, not least those with learning disabilities;
- » Increasing the number of adults who participate in sport and physical activity as part of the preventative health agenda;
- » Supporting increased funding for the Arts, particularly community based Arts projects, both rural and urban;
- » Promoting and resourcing sign language for people who are deaf and/or hearing impaired..

At Executive and Assembly level we will:

- » Work to restore the Irish language as the spoken language among the majority of people in Ireland and the creation of a truly bilingual society;
- » Work to put in place Acht na Ghaeilge in the north to promote and protect the rights of Irish Language speakers;
- » Work to establish an Acadamh for the Irish Language;
- » Take the lead on delivering Gaelteacht Quarters;
- » Promote Ulster Scots culture and heritage;
- » Increase public awareness about the contribution of culture and arts to the economy;
- » Develop increased library provision, particularly in rural areas;
- » Continue to develop local and regional sporting facilities.



HEALTH

Sinn Féin are in favour of a new universal public health system for Ireland that provides care to all, free at the point of delivery, on the basis of need alone, and funded from general, fair and progressive taxation. Whilst health is not a power that is devolved to Councils they nevertheless have a local responsibility in regard to Community Planning under which it will be important to work with Statutory Agencies to ensure the best health facilities and services are provided for local people.

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CRIME

Tackling crime and making communities safe is a priority for Sinn Féin. In dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour, prevention must be the priority. People have a right to feel safe in their homes and communities. Sinn Féin believe in promoting a civic, accountable all-Ireland policing and criminal justice agenda in full compliance with best human rights, equality and professional standards.

Locally Sinn Féin will:

- » Continue our work with the local Policing, Community and Safety Partnerships;
- » Through the Community Safety Partnerships continue to hold the local PSNI to account;
- » Identify and deal with existing or potential barriers to developing levels of confidence in our new policing dispensation;
- » Develop the concept of policing with the community as envisaged in Patten;
- » Prioritise the achievement of safer communities for citizens tormented by anti-social behaviour, crime and drugs;
- » Provide public safety in partnership with local communities and where appropriate provide Community Wardens to help address the issue of anti-social behaviour;
- » Ensure older people and those living on their own or in isolated areas feel secure in their homes.

Sinn Féin representatives on the Policing Board and Justice Committee will:

- » Continue to hold the PSNI accountable;
- » Eradicate practices like retire/rehire, and the operation of an old boys network;
- » Demand an end to use of plastic bullets in any circumstances
- » Continue to oppose the imposition of a parallel police force as constituted by the NCA, until the requisite levels of accountability, control and oversight to both the Chief Constable of the PSNI and the Policing Board are in place;
- » Ensure the civilianization and representativeness of the Police Service;
- » Ensure consistent prosecution of sexual assault, rape and domestic violence and ensure victim support services are available;
- » Tackle animal cruelty and ensure sanctions are in place for offenders;
- » Develop multi agency strategies to address anti social behaviour and the impact of crime and drugs on our communities.
- » Social development and housing
- » Sinn Féin believes there should be appropriate resources and targeted support, for the development of the community and voluntary sector, particularly through targeting public resources on the basis of greatest objective need. We also feel that accessible housing with reasonable rent and rates should be available to everyone..

Sinn Féin Councillors will:

- » Tackle dereliction in our town and city centres;
- » Ensure that local communities are fully involved in the creation of their local development plans and that plans are developed from a bottom-up approach;
- » Continue to support Grant Schemes which support local groups providing services to local people;
- » Tackle the bureaucracy faced by community projects and use of consultants by ensuring that publicly-funded audits and reporting are not repeatedly duplicated for different funders;
- » Review all land availability to see where assets can be released for the building of social and affordable housing;
- » Encourage councils to facilitate Housing Forums, bringing together the Housing Executive, Housing Associations and Private Landlords;
- » Examine what assets might be transferred to community ownership with a view of developing services for local people.

Alongside our Executive Ministers and Assembly Members we will;

- » Maintain our opposition to the “welfare reform” agenda of cuts proposed by the Tory Government;
- » Establish targets and timetables for the reduction of fuel poverty;
- » Ensure changes to the housing selection scheme are made to end discrimination against people in areas of high demand;
- » Ensure that disabled people, with a requirement for accessible housing are prioritised within the allocation of social housing;
- » Tackle the issue of void properties in the private sector.

ENVIRONMENT

- » Sinn Féin is committed to creating environmental standards on a coordinated island-wide basis. We are committed to the principle of sustainable development. We believe that all economic activity and policy decisions should be environmentally proofed to prevent needless damage to an island environment already under severe pressure from unnecessary pollution and inefficient waste management strategies.

Sinn Féin Councillors will:

- » Re-state our commitment to maximizing re-cycling initiatives, ensuring that land-fill is kept to a minimum;
- » Prioritise road safety initiatives within local council areas;
- » Seek to improve cycling safety in rural and urban areas through the provision of better infrastructure;
- » Ensure effective use of Planning Powers to adequately address the demands of renewable energy whilst also taking account of the concerns of local people;
- » Ensure effective implementation of planning and environmental powers to protect local communities from dilapidation and pollution.

Through our Assembly Team we will;

- » Build on current diversion from landfill and recycling initiatives to ensure that we have a safe and clean environment;
- » Work with all Statutory Agencies to improve road safety, reducing the number of deaths on our roads;
- » Develop rail and bus infrastructure and services to help create a cleaner and safer environment;
- » Ensure a policy of making the Polluter Pay for damage to the environment;
- » Develop an all island National Wind Energy Strategy which takes account of planning regulations, the views of the public taxation levels and the need for clear and accountable community benefit;
- » Campaign to reduce emissions and use of fossil fuels;
- » Support the implementation of a Marine Act that ensures the adoption of Marine Spatial Planning and the related designation of Marine Conservation Zones.



YOUTH

- » Sinn Féin works vigorously to guarantee increased rights for young people, and will continue to be the party that fights for their rights, regardless of their background and class. Sinn Féin have the youngest MLA in the history of the North, with Megan Fearon taking up the position at 20 years of age. We have a large number of local government candidates under 30 years of age. At local government level Sinn Féin are committed to ensuring young people are in leadership positions to guarantee that we are youth led and youth centred.

Sinn Féin Councillors are committed to:

- » Ensuring that young people have access to appropriate services locally;
- » Putting youth rights, work rights, sports, education, drugs, sexual awareness, suicide prevention, harassment and youth alienation to the fore of local government;
- » Ensuring that young people are part of the Community Planning process;
- » Empowering young people to become involved in local democratic decision making fora;
- » Establishing youth councils.

Part of the work of the wider Sinn Féin Team will be to:

- » Promote awareness of mental health and working for increased investment for young people suffering from this illness;
- » Standing up for young people and young families on low-incomes and those depending on social welfare who are being targeted by many of the measures contained in the welfare reform bill;
- » Working to reduce the voting age to 16;
- » Blocking any attempt to raise the level of cap on student fees;
- » Working for the retention of EMA;
- » Tackling emigration by making youth unemployment a national priority.



EU FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES POST 2014

In the European Parliament, Martina Anderson Sinn Féin MEP, is working to build a true partnership of equal sovereign states, co-operating in social and economic development. Within the EU, Sinn Féin have supported proposals and measures that are in Ireland's interests and we have opposed those that are not, including the European led austerity approach which has stifled economic recovery.

It is widely recognised that local government has in the past not been as successful at drawing down the amount of EU related funds as it could have.

With the diminishing levels of public sector finances that are available it will become even more important that councils maximise available EU funding opportunities. Stringent EU bureaucracy and auditing regimes have in the past meant local authorities were reluctant to submit often challenging and complex funding applications.

Whilst there has been successful programmes delivered under DARD and its Rural Development Programme, there exists other significant funding opportunities for local areas via ERDF, ESF, Interregg and Peace IV monies. Councils are being given increased roles the delivery of these funding opportunities.

Sinn Féin will ensure that there are dedicated, EU funding units created within each of the new councils in order to maximise the drawdown of EU funds for job creation, regeneration opportunities, sustainable energy etc.

Our MEP will work with all councils to ensure maximum support from Europe.
At the heart of all that we do are you, the people.





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