

How to change Northern Ireland. For good.

Manifesto 2017



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Introduction from Naomi Long

Dear friend,

Yet again, a Stormont government has collapsed. It happened under the UUP and SDLP, and now it's happening under the DUP and Sinn Féin.

While we didn't choose to be here, it actually gives you an opportunity to make change, for good.

It is your chance to take a stand against scandals, such as RHI, NAMA, Red Sky and links to paramilitaries. It is your chance to say enough is enough to the division that holds us back and costs us more per year than all of these other scandals put together.

That division won't go away if we keep voting along orange and green lines. We need to vote for people who will bring us together and make us stronger.

Our last manifesto – released only nine months ago – was a five-year plan to transform our Government and our community. In the last eight months, we made real progress towards delivering that promised change and we have highlighted some of those achievements in this document. We have also updated our plans to take account of what has happened since May 2016.

This manifesto is our agenda to change society: to one which is united, open, liberal and progressive.

If we use the opportunity this election provides wisely, we can not only transform our broken politics to ensure the people who got us into this mess cannot do it ever again, but also change Northern Ireland, for good:

- **Good Government** Open, honest and competent politics that delivers.
- **Good Relations** An open, fair and progressive society that includes everyone.
- **Good Prospects** Better jobs, more opportunities and a stronger economy.
- **Good Services** Better healthcare, smarter education and an end to waste.
- **Good Leadership** A stronger Alliance team challenging for you in the Assembly.

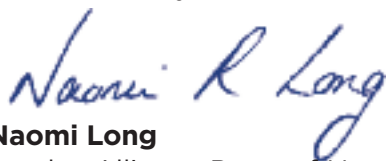
This election is your opportunity – maybe the best and perhaps the only one for a generation – to change our politics into something honest, open, responsible, respectful and hard-working. This is a golden opportunity to turn things around.

But you need to grasp it. You need to vote.

On March 2nd, vote Alliance.

Together, we can change Northern Ireland. For good.

Yours sincerely,



Naomi Long

Leader, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland



Executive Summary

Our manifesto includes a comprehensive set of proposals to change our society. This summary highlights our key commitments to change things. For good.

Good government

The Assembly's structures often allow political parties to create gridlock and hold up important decisions. **We will reform the Assembly in order to create a more normal government-and-opposition political system, including the removal of sectarian designations and ending the abuse of Petitions of Concern.**

The public deserve to know who donates money to Northern Ireland's political parties. **We will build on Naomi Long's work to ensure all donations from January 2014 will eventually be made public by lobbying the Secretary of State to end Northern Ireland's donor secrecy rules with immediate effect. Alliance already voluntarily publish this information.**

The Human Rights Act is an essential component of the Good Friday Agreement and attempts to repeal it will hold us back. **We will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act.**

Good relations

Creating a shared future has not progressed quickly enough, with the DUP and Sinn Féin failing to implement many of their own proposals on this issue. **We will develop a comprehensive approach to promoting a shared future, through prioritising integrated education, shared neighbourhoods and promoting community relations.**

The Executive Office and its predecessor OFMDFM, run by the DUP and Sinn Féin, has not introduced a single piece of equality legislation since 2007. **We will introduce a Single Equality Bill to overcome the lack of progress on equality legislation and bring protections in Northern Ireland up to date.**

22 years after the ceasefires and 18 years after the Good Friday Agreement, all illegal organisations should have long ceased to exist. **We will pursue a robust Executive-wide strategy to tackle all paramilitary and organised crime groups.**

Good prospects

Access to European markets is essential to the economy of Northern Ireland. It provides us with a huge market for our products and is particularly important for business that trade across the island of Ireland. **We will campaign for the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland to be recognised through a Special Status which would include remaining in the EU's Single Market and Customs Union in Brexit negotiations.**

Northern Ireland's economy is still held back by political deadlock and disagreement. **We will create a robust inter-departmental economic strategy which focuses on job creation and growth.**

Even though a rate for corporation tax has been agreed, there has been no agreement on how we will improve skills in order to maximise this opportunity. **We will invest at least an additional £85 million each year in skills.**

Good services

Despite over-subscribed schools and public support for integrated education, education in Northern Ireland continues to be provided at primary and secondary level on a predominately segregated basis. **We have a nine-point plan to expand the provision of integrated education.**

Our health and social services are going through the greatest period of change and challenge for many years, but the current approach is not sustainable and not enough is being done to change it. **We will implement a programme of reform based on clinical evidence to secure a National Health Service, and not merely a notional one. This will include further investments in access for patients.**

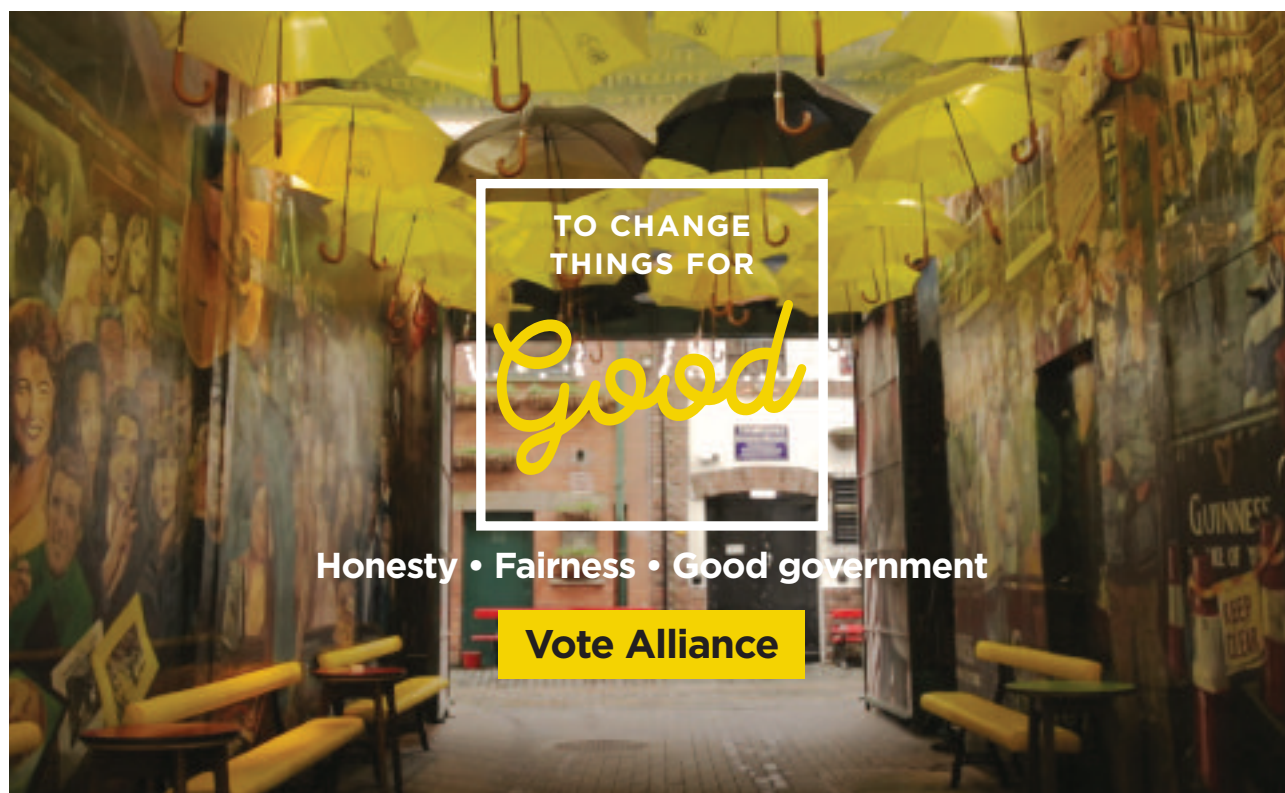
The DUP and Sinn Fein failed to spend £8 million out of the £12 million allocated to childcare in 2011-15 and haven't produced a comprehensive strategy. **We will produce a childcare strategy which develops affordable childcare opportunities to ease the burden on working parents.**

Good leadership

Alliance has taken a strong stand against sectarian division in Northern Ireland. Since our foundation in 1970 we have blazed a trail by promoting reconciliation and a shared society. **We will develop 'shared future proofing' so that all future Executive decisions promote sharing rather than separation.**

The proposed withdrawal from the European Union poses major constitutional, economic and political challenges for Northern Ireland, but the DUP and Sinn Fein have failed to negotiate a sensible approach to them. **We will develop robust proposals for 'Special Status' for Northern Ireland, recognising that Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU.**

Led by Naomi Long, the Alliance has promoted openness and transparency in public life. This has been in stark contrast to other parties who have sought to obstruct and obfuscate when challenged. Alliance stands for politics which are open, transparent and accountable. **We will strengthen investigations into Ministerial wrong-doing by placing the Ministerial Code on a stronger legal footing and establishing independent investigations into alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code.**



Alliance leading change in the Assembly

Alliance proposed five changes that were necessary before we would enter government. The DUP and Sinn Féin rejected them and, as a result, we were unable to enter the Executive. These five points remain our pre-conditions for any involvement in the Executive. We proposed:

- A significant restriction in the use of Petitions of Concern, in to bring it in line with the original intent.
- A step-change in the Executive's commitment to integrated education, including new legislation.
- A short timetable for resolving issues around the legacy of the past, including an anti-paramilitary strategy.
- A significant investment in skills and universities.
- An independent assessment of the costs of division within Departments with subsequent strategies to address them.

The full detail of our proposals can be found on the Alliance Party website at:
<https://allianceparty.org/document/proposals/alliance-proposals.pdf>

Since the election, Alliance has made significant progress on following-up the issues in our manifesto. In the past eight months, we have:

Political reform

- Ensured transparency was on the Assembly agenda by highlighting these issues in debate.
- Launched a petition asking the Secretary of State to lift the donor secrecy rules in Northern Ireland. This builds on Naomi Long's work to ensure that all donations since January 2014 will eventually be made public.
- Engaged with the Programme for Government process with substantive responses to the Executive's consultations.

Shared future and equality

- Developed a bill to regulate the flying of flags on lampposts and street furniture, so that this controversial issue can finally be put to rest. Paula Bradshaw carried out extensive stakeholder consultation, and the proposal was ready to be tested through an online survey.
- Developed an Equal Marriage Bill, working with members of other parties to ensure this issue is dealt with in a mature, cross-party manner.
- Developed an Integrated Education Bill, which would have reformed the law around integrated education to help ensure every child had the right to attend an integrated school.
- Engaged with voluntary sector organisations that support asylum seekers and refugee families, to identify issues impacting on their quality of life.
- Provided support to refugee families in relation to housing and access to training courses and education provision. In addition, a very successful appeal was made to encourage the public to donate winter coats and clothes for their children, with 45 families attending an event to collect the donations.
- Hosted the Book of Commitment in the Northern Ireland Assembly as part of Holocaust Memorial Day.

Justice

- Highlighted the failings of the Executive's anti-paramilitarism action plan through Assembly debates and questions.
- Advocated for new legislation on 'coercive control' to strengthen the law around domestic abuse.
- Continued to highlight the failure of DUP and Sinn Fein to resolve issues around the legacy of the past. We have highlighted the concerns of victims, families and the Lord Chief Justice about the lack of agreement and its impact on the justice system.
- Scrutinise the impact of drugs, suicide and self-harm within prisons.
- Pressed for continued reform of our prison system, to reduce re-offending and safeguard the welfare of staff and prisoners.

Economy and skills

- Secured cross-party Assembly recognition of the critical importance of the EU Single Market for Northern Ireland's future competitiveness.
- Highlighted the need to retain access to research and development funding for the economy.
- Called for a refresh of energy policy to meet our energy security and renewable energy requirements.
- Proposed legislation on Social Value, which has since been taken up by the Executive.

Education

- Scrutinised the decision of the Minister to allow schools to prepare for the 11+ and worked to examine the impact of academic selection; including pushing for the first draft of the ILIAD Report and securing a cross-party committee inquiry into the issue (which has now been blocked by the election).
- Called the Education Minister before the Education Committee to account for pressures placed on schools' budgets.
- Presented a petition demanding the Education Authority maintain full-time Special Educational Needs nursery provision.
- Continued to promote the 'Cost of Childcare' survey and advocate for better childcare provision.
- Presented a petition signed by over 6000 people on retention of full time special educational needs nursery provision to the Education Minister and led Education Committee scrutiny of the Education Authority on behalf of concerned parents and teaching staff on this issue.
- Advocated for an increase to free early education (nursery provision) from 12.5 hours per week to at least 20 hours per week.
- Led the questioning of the Education Minister on his refusal to award a 1% cost of living pay increase to teachers for 2015/16 and his administration of a school budgets crisis.
- Secured Assembly agreement and a commitment from the Education Minister to both review the number of physical education hours per week accessed by children in our schools, and hold a public consultation on whether a statutory obligation on a minimum number of hours is needed.

- Opposed Education Authority proposals to close Outdoor Education Centres across Northern Ireland and cease Youth Work funding in Belfast.
- Consistently scrutinised the Education Minister and Executive on their inadequate targets and provision to meet the growing parental and pupil demand for Integrated Education.

Health and Social Services

- Taken a mature approach to health service reform, recognising the need to reform the health service in order to invest in improving services.
- Presented a petition to the Assembly calling for better access to cancer drugs for people in Northern Ireland.
- Secured Assembly agreement, including from the Health Minister, that when PrEP (HIV prevention medicine) is introduced in England through NICE, it will also be introduced into Northern Ireland.
- Successfully lobbied the Health Minister to authorise the commissioning by the Health & Social Care Board of Nivolumab, a life-extending drug treatment for melanoma, non-small cell lung cancer or kidney (renal cell) cancer.
- Proposed, and secured agreement from the Health Committee for, an Inquiry into how allied health professionals could be better engaged in primary care to take pressures off GP Practices. The snap election has prevented this from going ahead.
- Acted as a strong advocate, on the Assembly floor and to NGOs, for a programme of Health and Social Care Transformation and Reform based on clinical evidence and best practice.
- Argued for the removal of mental health stigma and the mainstreaming of Mental Health services, and supported the voluntary sector campaigns to highlight the need for increased investment in services.
- Demanded a properly funded plan for tackling waiting lists, both in the short term and the long term, using the full range of resources available more efficiently and effectively.
- Highlighted the impact of Brexit on the ability to operate and regulate cross-border specialist services in the interests of everyone across the island of Ireland.

Sought assurances that health research in Northern Ireland will be protected and enhanced despite Brexit.

- Advocated for a full Helicopter Emergency Medical Service for Northern Ireland and the border counties, including a fully trained medic on board in line with the UK standard.
- Emphasised the need to direct patients more appropriately as soon as they enter the system so that pressure is not applied in the wrong place and appropriate treatment is delivered efficiently.
- Acted as an advocate for the voluntary and community sector as an integral part of the overall system, which in many cases provides specialist services.
- Engaged with cancer charities to advocate strongly for a specific comprehensive Cancer Strategy as part of the transformation process, including a focus on early identification plus equality of access to treatment and drugs with the rest of the UK.
- Engaged with the Public Health Agency to continue to promote health and wellbeing in general, and pathways for certain conditions such as M.E., Huntington's Disease, Post-Polio Syndrome, and Parkinson's specifically.

Communities

- Opposed the decision not to pass regeneration powers on to local councils and worked with councils to make their opposition also known.
- Worked to propose a more liberal licensing arrangement with more reasonable opening hours and a special dispensation for breweries. This has included calling for simplified licensing reform, easier access to certificates for businesses, and reform for small brewers whose businesses are stifled by not being able to promote their product at fairs or on site.
- Held Ministers to account over the need to secure a derogation on the reclassification of Housing Associations.
- Challenged the Minister over his record on LGBT issues and engagement with LGBT groups.
- Called for additional investment in the Advice Sector to address challenges of Welfare Reform.
- Opposed the Minister's decision to cut the Líofo Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme and helped work for its restoration.
- Scrutinised the Minister on his poor rationale for not support integrated public housing.

Environment and Agriculture

- Developed an Animal Welfare Bill to ban snare, wild animals in circuses and fox hunting.
- Continued to press for a Climate Change Act and an independent Environmental Protection Agency.
- Highlighted the financial issues associated with the proposed uncoded move of DAERA headquarters to Ballykelly.
- Challenged the failure of the DUP and Sinn Féin to agree a plan for agricultural subsidies following any withdrawal from the EU. This is especially important in Northern Ireland due to our increased reliance on agricultural and rural support.

Infrastructure

- Raised concerns in the Infrastructure Committee about the sustainability of water subsidies, especially given the lack of financial planning for the future and poor quality of water and sewerage infrastructure.
- Convened groups of individuals affected by coastal flooding in order to make this issue a priority for the Executive.
- Challenged the Minister's prioritisation of road schemes, including his decision to de-prioritise the York Street Interchange and the Ballynahinch by-pass.
- Campaigned for £10 per capita investment in cycling infrastructure and other efficient sustainable transport.

Finance

- Highlighted the challenges faced by the economy, public services and the community sector by the failure of the Executive to agree a budget. This includes a failure to pursue reform as well as uncertainty for staff on contracts that are dependent on renewed funding.
- Highlighted the consequences of the failure of the Executive to set a regional rate, including the impact on local councils and the potential for fewer, higher payments for ratepayers.
- Continued to challenge the Executive to tackle the cost of division, which independent research commissioned by the Department of Finance indicates stands at over half a billion pounds every year.

Alliance leading change in a stable Executive

Alliance has demonstrated that we can provide grown-up politics. In the Executive between 2010 and 2016, Alliance Ministers David Ford and Stephen Farry were widely credited for delivering real change and for their mature, responsible approach to politics.

Alliance's key achievements for the economy

- Delivered a new strategy to radically transform the apprenticeship system.
- Froze tuition fees for local students attending NI universities.
- Developed new student support packages for part-time undergraduate and master's studies.
- Delivered over 1,400 additional university places in Science and Technology.
- Doubled the number of state-funded PhD places over this decade.
- Created 5,000 jobs through the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) Assured Skills Programme.
- Invested in strengthening NI Research Base and its links to employers.
- Developed and implemented a new strategy to give Further Education Colleges a central role in providing skills for industry and supporting employers.
- Developed action plans for the crucial ICT, Engineering, and Food & Drink sectors.
- Assisted over 40,000 young people to secure employment.
- Supported over 6,000 young people who were not in education, employment and training.
- Introduced shared parental leave and greater access to flexible working.
- Assisted over 1,000 families through the Community Family Support Programme.
- Radically improved careers provision.



Alliance's key achievements for the justice system

- Channelled £21 million towards reducing crime and enhancing community safety.
- Developed a five-year Victims and Witnesses Strategy.
- Distributed £3 million to community organisations to prevent and reduce crime and the fear of crime.
- Strengthened the sentences for animal cruelty.
- Delivered a radical prison reform programme focussed on the rehabilitation of offenders.
- Secured the operation of the National Crime Agency in the devolved arena.
- Established a new Joint Agency Cross Border Task Force.
- Created new Domestic Violence Protection Notices.
- Delivered Northern Ireland's first government-wide Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending.
- Modernised Northern Ireland's forensic science service, reducing the average time taken to produce a forensic report by 40%.

After the DUP and Sinn Fein refused to agree our five progressive demands for reform, Alliance could not enter the new Executive. However, we have worked hard to ensure we have used our influence in the Assembly to deliver change even from outside of the Executive.



Political Reform

Stormont needs a transformation.

In the years since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland has not been able to reach its full potential as an economy and a society. Opportunities have been missed, and political division has led to poor outcomes on some issues and complete deadlock on others. Our system of government has increasingly become marred by the lack of openness and accountability, and characterised by corruption and cronyism. Cheap populism and favouritism to preferred sections of society have led to an inefficient and unfair allocation of resources. All of this has curtailed the potential of our economy and limited the quality of our public services.

Every government needs to work on the basis of trust, respect and partnership. There also needs to be a shared understanding of the common good, a commitment to cohesion, and adherence to collective responsibility. It is disputable to what extent the necessary relationships between the parties in government over the past 18 years have ever been sufficient. However, they have deteriorated even further in recent years.

However, the nature and design of the institutions and the mechanisms of government can magnify or alternatively help address disagreement, plus incentivise or disincentivise co-operation and progress.

Alliance is committed to stable and sustainable power-sharing that respects liberal, democratic principles and which reinforces the development of a normal, civic society and the creation of a shared future.

We have always supported reform of the structures of government. In light of recent developments, significant reform becomes even more necessary.

Transform Stormont

Alliance supported the Good Friday Agreement, despite our concerns over several aspects of the details, particularly relating to the institutions. These concerns include:

- Institutional sectarianism, in particular the designation and related voting system in the Assembly.
- The politics of ‘them’ versus ‘us’ over control of territory and resources rather than any consideration of a shared vision and common goals for Northern Ireland.
- Co-operation, moderation and accommodation have not been incentivised: instead entrenched intra-communal competition rewards hard-line and exclusive politics.
- Departments tend to exist within silos, and there is insufficient joined-up government and collaboration in relation to cross-cutting issues.

In particular, the mutual vetoes granted to the largest parties have been counter-productive. Alliance has suggested a number of ways to secure a better functioning and more stable political system for Northern Ireland. We will:

- End the process of communal designation in the Assembly, and replace it with a requirement for weighted majorities on defined key votes or in situations where a reformed Petition of Concern has been invoked;
- Reform the Petition of Concern system. It should also be limited to: matters of national identity; matters which relate to the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland; or matters which relate to the constitutional structure and institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement. In the meantime, we will support a Protocol between the parties to prevent abuse of the Petition of Concern system.

- Establish a coalition which is decided through voluntary negotiation between parties and subject to a vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Collective responsibility must apply.
- Re-name the First Minister and deputy First Minister as “Joint First Ministers.” This would depoliticise what has become a potentially polarising contest over which party has a claim to First Minister and which party is “relegated” to deputy First Minister. The Executive Office should remain a joint office.
- Subject the final make-up of the Executive to confirmation by the Assembly.
- Ensure that the development, negotiation and public consultation on a Programme for Government is a serious process that creates a document which is strategic and outcome-focused.
- Modify the exclusion mechanisms to more clearly define the highest standards of integrity with respect to the rule of law for parties holding office, and to prevent any party being able to veto sanctions against themselves.
- Legislate to require greater co-operation between Ministers on specific issues.
- Develop a system of independent investigations into alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code.
- Require that Special Advisers are subject to the Civil Service disciplinary procedure.
- Ensure that all Executive policies are “shared future-proofed” to ensure that all public investment supports and underpins an open, peaceful and united society rather than continuing division.
- Further develop the North-South Ministerial Council, including the creation of a work plan that is informed by a Programme for Government in each jurisdiction.
- Introduce a lobbying register in Northern Ireland.
- Open Ministerial diaries to the public.
- Develop an Open Data Strategy for all Executive departments.
- Let the public know who donates money to Northern Ireland’s political parties; building on Naomi Long’s work to ensure all donations from January 2014 will eventually be public by lobbying the Secretary of State to end Northern Ireland’s donor secrecy rules as soon as possible.

Civic Engagement

The Civic Forum for Northern Ireland was established as part of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and was suspended alongside the Assembly in 2002. Despite it being an integral part of the institutions set out within the Good Friday Agreement, and subsequently endorsed by public referendum, it has not functioned since this date. We believe that the previous model for the Civic Forum is not suitable for the current political climate and instead proposed a new model, based on the Scottish Futures Forum, which has a small executive but plans a wide-ranging workload and engages with civic society as appropriate.

We were pleased when Alliance proposals for this body were incorporated into recent political agreements and welcomed the appointment of its board. We will work with this body to set an ambitious Terms of Reference and to ensure it interacts well with public bodies.

As well as this, we will also support the establishment of a Youth Assembly.

A Changing Constitution

The United Kingdom is in the process of a significant re-working of the British constitution, with more powers devolved from Westminster and across the various constituent parts of the UK. Additionally, the proposed withdrawal from the EU will have significant implications for our constitution and relations between all parts of the UK's political institutions.

Alliance has consistently supported devolving power over public services to the lowest practical level.

As part of the process of constitutional change, Alliance believes there is an opportunity to move to a more durable constitutional settlement which supports devolution. We support a move towards a federal UK, retaining strong links with our European neighbours. The Northern Ireland Assembly must be advocating for these changes. Alliance will:

- Support additional powers being conferred on the devolved administrations. There must be an assumption that the devolved administrations should take on these powers when they are capable and willing to do so.
- Support a UK-wide constitutional convention being held to determine the future of the constitution in light of these reforms. This should explicitly deal with the democratic deficit in England following devolution in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The convention should examine a wider range of issues in the British constitution, such as reform of the House of Lords. This initiative is now even more pressing in the wake of the Brexit referendum result.
- Remain open to further tax-varying powers, subject to the Executive demonstrating maturity around public finances. We do not believe that the other Executive parties have demonstrated the maturity for these to be devolved at this stage. The revenue raised by any such taxes should be retained by the Executive.
- Enable Northern Ireland to borrow similar amounts of money as Scotland and Wales (as a share of the budget) without Treasury approval. The UK Government should be empowered to set the overall debt framework for the UK's public bodies.

Civil Liberties

Alliance is committed to personal liberty, privacy and civil rights. We believe that these help to ensure that individuals are able to exercise their own choices and that the state acts fairly. As a party which respects the rule of law, we know how important it is to ensure civil liberties are protected. In order to do so, Alliance will:

- Oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act.
- Support the passage of legislation equivalent to the Defamation Act by the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Undertake a review of super-injunctions in Northern Ireland.

Shared Future and Equality

Creating an integrated and shared society is the overriding mission of Alliance and will be our central purpose in the Assembly.

The Alliance Party has a vision of a cohesive, shared and integrated society, where people are safe and prosperous, have ample opportunities and are treated fairly and with respect. This civic society would be underpinned by our shared values of equality, respect for diversity and interdependence. Alliance rejects the notion of parallel societies, with so-called 'separate, but equal' provision.

Equality and human rights issues are an essential part of this shared future. Alliance will promote equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, equality of access, and equality under the law for all people, irrespective of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief, race and ethnicity, and political opinion.

Shared Future

Radical changes are needed to reduce the impact of division on our society. This cannot be the mission of one Executive Minister, but must be a priority across every department. Shared future considerations and a commitment to integration are included across our manifesto and any Alliance Minister will make it a priority in their department.

As well as embedding our commitments to a shared future across in Executive department, there are a number of initiatives which can be taken forward to ensure that all departments are working to promote integration and reduce division.

At the heart of this must be a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy to replace the inadequate strategy, 'Together: Building a United Community'. We recommend that it follows best practice in policy development and includes the following elements:

- Clear definitions and understanding of key concepts of 'cohesion', 'sharing', and 'integration'.
- Strong vision and values that are used to drive forward the core objective of achieving cohesion, sharing and integration.
- Context and links between this strategy and other government policy objectives.
- An action plan with timetable and targets.
- Resourcing commitments.
- Clarity around a delivery mechanism and a monitoring and evaluation framework.

As there is an inextricable relationship between the creation of a shared future and the economic transformation of Northern Ireland, any strategy for a shared future must recognise that continued divisions limit Northern Ireland's potential. The promotion of good relations will bring opportunities for enhanced economic and social progress. The Executive must put in place the mechanisms, policies and programmes to address the economic, social and financial aspects of division and to assist in the creation of a shared future. We would like to see:

- A practical and costed plan to tackle the financial and other implications of divisions within future Programmes for Government and Budgets.
- All major policies assessed for their potential impact on sharing versus separation through Shared Future Policy Proofing.
- All Departments conducting formal audits of their budgets and publishing their assessment of the impact of societal division.
- All Departments being obliged to actively encourage de-segregation and to promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.

- Shared future considerations being fully integrated into all future departmental economic and social policies, and programmes, including the next Economic Strategy.
- Resources being made available to enable investments in resources to support longer term reduction in hostility and the normalisation of sharing, either through the provision of shared goods, facilities and services to meet demand or to provide support and security for those making the choice to mix, share or integrate.
- New leisure, educational, health, social and community facilities being built with an explicit objective to ensure optimal and open public use.
- A comprehensive and pro-active focus on area-based planning for schools, rather than one based on sectors, and full appreciation of the financial and economic benefits, of shared and integrated options.

This will, however, only set the context within which Executive Departments should develop policies for sharing and integration. Throughout this manifesto, we have incorporated many policies which will support a shared future for Northern Ireland.

Parades, Flags and Dealing with the Past

We believe that the peace process remains under threat as the direct result of other politicians being unable to come to agreement on tackling the controversial issues of parading, flags and the past. This has the potential to undermine public confidence in politics, in the Northern Ireland institutions and on the peace process as a whole.

We are clear that these issues need to be settled. It is irresponsible for politicians of any party to refuse to negotiate on these important matters. Since the last Westminster elections, issues around parading, the display of flags and how we deal with the legacy of the past have all caused significant problems or challenges. Reactions to these issues have also raised tensions within our community and been cited as a justification for public disorder.

Alliance will:

- Develop a model for parading which reduces sectarian behaviour, ensures the legitimacy of any new parading body and seeks local agreement as its first priority.
- Pursue the implementation of a 'designated days' policy for the flying of flags on each civic headquarters.
- Introduce a regulatory system for the flying of flags on lampposts; similar to the private member's bill developed by Alliance MLA Paula Bradshaw.

Details on proposals regarding dealing with the legacy of the past can be found in the Justice section later on in this manifesto.



Good Relations

Promoting good relations across our community is an important part of creating a shared future. Over the years many individuals and organisations have taken forward remarkable work to advance good relations in this society. As the party who are most dedicated to promoting reconciliation, we have supported this work.

Too much time and energy has been wasted on arguments about whether 'equality' is more important than 'good relations'. We reject this hierarchy. Policies on 'equality' and 'good relations' must be applied in a manner to reinforce each other rather than set in opposition. There is a clear relationship between the two. Any society which intimidates or generates fear among some of its citizens or systematically excludes or discriminates against them cannot be equal. In turn, a shared society cannot be delivered without equality. Therefore, to achieve equality we must insist on an inclusive society and to achieve an inclusive society we must insist on equality.

We also accept that other groups need to be incorporated into the good relations framework. It is important to Alliance that we do not merely seek to include those seen to be from the two main traditions in Northern Ireland but create a community that integrates every resident. In order to strengthen good relations, we will:

- Apply the 'Good relations' duty to all organisations operating in the public sector, including on the basis of sexuality, gender, disability and other criteria, covered by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.
- End the false debate between equality and good relations and instead seek a collaborative approach between the two concepts.
- Oppose moves to merge the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council.
- Insert good relations indicators into appropriate Departmental strategies to ensure that these are contributing to improving good relations.
- Actively monitor and assist local councils in designing good relations strategies and ensuring they improve good relations in their area.

Human Rights

We recognise that human rights are inherent and universal. They are an essential part of modern governance and protect the individual from injustice. As a consequence, Alliance is a strong supporter of the European Convention on Human Rights and will oppose any attempts to repeal or dilute the Human Rights Act. This is especially important in the context of both the proposed withdrawal from the EU and moves by the Prime Minister to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.

Whilst Alliance is open to a strong Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, we believe that significant intellectual and political hurdles must be overcome to provide compelling arguments as to why Northern Ireland requires a fundamentally different human rights regime to other, especially neighbouring, jurisdictions.

For Alliance any Northern Ireland Bill of Rights must be:

- Realistic and capable of being enforced through our own courts.
- Consistent with European and international standards.
- Flexible, to take account of changing circumstances and an evolving Northern Ireland.
- Inclusive, in that it avoids entrenching any particular view of identity, such as the notion of two separate communities in Northern Ireland, and accordingly, sectarian divisions.

Equality

Alliance believes equality legislation, in particular the monitoring of outcomes, should properly reflect and respect the diversity of identities.

Equality policy is primarily devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is a matter of concern that no significant progressive reform to equality legislation has so far been passed under devolution: all the major reforms have occurred under 'Direct Rule'. This is not sustainable. While devolution creates a powerful regional dimension to policy-making, this should primarily relate to decisions regarding the allocation of resources to fit particular economic and social circumstances, rather than creating special rights regimes. Alliance believes that there should be the same standard of equality provisions throughout the United Kingdom. Alliance advocates the creation of a Single Equality Act for Northern Ireland.

This Act will harmonise existing equality and anti-discrimination measures and update and strengthen equality provisions. Our Act would also revise Fair Employment monitoring to better reflect the diversity of mixed and multiple identities within Northern Ireland. The introduction of the Equality Act (2010) in Great Britain means that in certain areas our legislation lags behind best practice.

Alliance is deeply concerned about the rise in racial and religious hatred in Northern Ireland in recent years. This is a worrying trend and we believe it is necessary that the Executive takes immediate steps to strengthen and implement the current strategy. We want to guarantee that racial prejudice is diminished and equality of opportunity is developed.

Our proposal for a Single Equality Act would bring racial equality legislation in line with the rest of the UK. Whilst this goes alongside the need to update other parts of equality legislation in Northern Ireland, this could be an opportunity to use legislation as an instrument to deliver on racial and religious protections.

Alliance believes that those fleeing persecution and civil war should be able to find refuge in Northern Ireland. We have an obligation to help people escape such tragic circumstances and to ensure they are treated humanely. In order to meet this obligation, we will:

- Use our Single Equality Act to update the racial equality legislation and bring it into line with the UK.
- Encourage the UK Government to accept its proportionate share of refugees entering the European Union.
- Ensure the new Department for Communities has a comprehensive plan in place to accommodate refugees.
- Work with housing providers to ensure homes for refugees are easily available, safe and identifiable.
- Ensure the provision of free English lessons for all refugees, initially delivered by an Alliance Minister, remains in place.

People with disabilities

People with disabilities make a significant contribution to Northern Ireland. However, we recognise that social and economic changes are needed to remove barriers which prevent disabled people from achieving full equality. We will:

- Reform welfare assessments so that people with lifelong, debilitating conditions are not required to undergo regular re-assessment.
- Advocate for the installation of both audio and visual announcements across all forms of public transport and develop other mechanisms for making public transport as user-friendly as possible.
- Make streets as user-friendly as possible.
- Produce standards for accessible information for public services, similar to the guidelines produced by the Department for Health in England.
- Implement the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.
- Build on our record in the Executive to ensure a wide variety of education and training and schemes are available in Northern Ireland.
- Support the Independent Living Fund.
- Provide specific assistance for disabled people and their employers to allow access to work.
- Assist with removing communication barriers and support the work of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Women

Alliance has always promoted the need for practical interventions to remove systemic barriers which prevent equal opportunities for women. This has included supporting the right of women to reach their potential in work, public life and public services. We will continue to represent women whose views are often unrepresented in the public debate about the future of Northern Ireland. Whilst the perspective of women must be seen across all levels of governance, our priorities for supporting women will include:

- Promoting gender considerations into careers promotion, particularly in relation to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) opportunities.
- Setting robust targets for the uptake in Northern Ireland of UK-wide childcare schemes, as part of a comprehensive Childcare Strategy in Northern Ireland.
- Continuing to promote the new system of Shared Parental Leave and Flexible Working which Alliance introduced via the Department for Employment and Learning.
- Developing and promoting policies in the workplace to better facilitate retention and progression for women.
- Establishing mentoring schemes to assist women in the public and private sectors, with an aim to increase the number of women in decision-making positions.
- Reforming the pension system to ensure it is based on residence, recognising that women are more likely to take breaks from contributions or make lower levels of contributions.
- Continuing our strong opposition to domestic and sexual violence by investing in welfare facilities, education and awareness programmes. This will include support for refuges and other support services for victims, and recognition that these services require specialist expertise and knowledge from providers.
- Renewing efforts to tackle Equal Pay and implement regulations about public audits of the gender profile of pay by large employers.

- Opposing the practice of Female Genital Mutilation across the world by calling for a global ban and realistic enforcement.
- Promoting the need for access to education for women and girls to be recognised as part of the UK's international development spending, reflecting specific targets within the post-2015 Development Goals.

LGBT rights

Alliance has long supported the improvement of rights afforded to the LGBT community, who often face discrimination on a wide range of issues. Our priorities for improving the rights of LGBT people include:

- Introducing legislation to extend civil marriage provisions to same sex couples, including robust protections for faith groups and religious celebrants who do not wish to marry same-sex couples. Naomi Long was part of a cross-party effort to achieve this and will continue to pursue a private member's bill after the election if necessary.
- Continuing to oppose the proposed 'Conscience Clause' which is poorly defined and is a charter for discrimination.
- Lifting the ban on gay (and unmarried) couples adopting
- Producing guidance for schools on tackling homophobic bullying.
- Asking every service to audit how their services are provided to LGBT people to ensure no accidental bias is included in the public services.
- Developing a comprehensive Strategy for Transgender People to ensure that the distinct needs of transgender people are reflected in public services and other areas of life. We will back this up with legislation if necessary.

Children and young people

Alliance believes that children and young people are an important part of Northern Ireland's society. We want to ensure they are neither left out of political debate nor disproportionately affected by the current economic and financial challenges. We will:

- Improve the political voice of young people by arguing for the introduction Votes at 16 as part of legislation which covers people of all ages.
- Ensure that any new age discrimination legislation outlaws age discrimination against under-16s in Northern Ireland.
- Introduce children's budgeting for spending in Northern Ireland to ensure transparency on overall spending on children.
- Build on our record in the Executive to ensure a wide variety of education, training and employment schemes continue to be available specifically designed to assist young people.
- Develop the financial skills of young people through education and collaboration with banks to produce financial services suitable for children.

Older people

We need to see a shift in the way we consider older people's contribution to society. Often older people are seen primarily as users of health and social care. Whilst it is important that we reform these services to ensure they meet the needs of older people, Alliance also wants to focus on the positive aspects that older people bring to Northern Ireland. We will achieve this by:

- Using the Active Ageing Strategy as the basis of our provision of services to older people. We acknowledge that the current strategy is imperfect and will seek to improve it.
- Produce a Single Equality Act which covers age discrimination against older people.
- Recognise that many older people may wish to stay in work and provide them with the opportunity to improve their skills.
- Better promote the uptake of pension credit and other benefits on which older people sometimes miss out.

Our proposals for health and social care reform can be found in the health section of this manifesto.



Mitigating the Impact of Brexit upon Northern Ireland

Alliance supported the 'Remain' choice in the 2016 Referendum on the United Kingdom's continued participation in the European Union.

We maintain that any departure from the EU will have major economic, financial, social and environment consequences for the UK, and diminish its global standing and influence. It will also create significant challenges for, and diminish, the European Union itself and the wider international system.

The impact on the Republic of Ireland, the island of Ireland and in particular Northern Ireland are set to be particularly difficult, and, indeed, catastrophic in some respects.

Alliance's position is that the UK as a whole should reconsider leaving the European Union. If that is not on the agenda, our preference is for the softest Brexit possible, including continued membership of the EU Single Market and adherence to the Four Fundamental Freedoms (around the freedom of movement of workers, goods, services and capital) and membership of the EU Customs Union and Common External Tariff.

Independent of these considerations, but nevertheless shaped by them, Alliance will continue to argue for special arrangements to be negotiated and put in place for Northern Ireland, and for this region to be accorded a Special Status in terms of either continued associate membership of the European Union or a bespoke relationship with it. This outcome is not only necessarily to protect the Good Friday Agreement, but also must be consistent with the principles and terms of that Agreement, including the Principle of Consent.

Impacts on Northern Ireland

Finance

In terms of finance, Northern Ireland is more dependent upon financial transfers from the EU than most other EU regions and it is unlikely that this resource can or will be replaced direct from the UK Treasury. This is particularly the case with Agricultural support. Northern Ireland receives 10% of EU farm support into the UK, with just 3% of the population. Impacts could also be acute for the community and voluntary sector; universities; apprenticeships and other forms of training; and employment initiatives.

Economics

Economically, Northern Ireland has been lagging behind the performance levels of most of the rest of the UK and in some respects the Republic of Ireland due to a range of structural factors. While there has been an improvement in economic performance in recent years, the process of addressing these structural challenges is still at an early stage. Northern Ireland needs to have a greater level of economic transformation due to the legacy of violence and division.

For example, the rate of economic growth is lower than in the UK as a whole. The UK overall has a productivity issue, but the challenge in Northern Ireland is more acute. The employment rate and level of economic inactivity, while at their best levels for decades in the context of Northern Ireland, are nevertheless significantly poorer than the UK average.

In terms of the European Union, Northern Ireland is proportionately more dependent on exporting to the Single Market than Great Britain, reflecting in large part the level of existing economic integration on the island of Ireland.

Just as our economy was about to take off with a step-change around Corporation Tax and associated investments in key economic drivers such as skills, Brexit brings the potential to haul it back down.

Recent successes in inward investment have been around the attraction of cost centres. This attraction is based on strong skills base provided on a more competitive basis than other regions. This model can continue, if Northern Ireland wants to make a step-change in our inward investment profile to attract profit-centres. This would bring us into line with the type of investments that our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland have been able to attract and retain. However, we need certainty in terms of our relationship to Europe. Investment needs to be pitched on Tax, Talent, and Trade.

Furthermore, a mere economic dip in the rest of the UK can become a full recession in Northern Ireland. The UK overall is at risk of a shrinking economy, a fall in value of pound and slowdown in GDP growth. Brexit entails a resetting of the UK's GDP baseline for medium to long term.

The economic stakes for Northern Ireland are therefore very high. There is a real danger of Brexit contributing to economic stagnation, combined with the perception of this region being a social backwater as it falls further and further behind in terms of progressive reforms that are happening in other states and regions. Furthermore, the perception of the 'brain-drain' may return, and become a feature not just at age 18, but also after people qualify through colleges and universities but find diminished opportunities to utilise those qualifications.

Wider political uncertainty and a compromised relationship with the EU Single Market will have a particular impact. Northern Ireland has been placing a strong focus on attracting inward investment from the United States on the basis of offering an English speaking region with strong skills and competitive costs with ready access to the EU.

It is wrong for Brexit advocates to be so dismissive of the level of trade with our nearest neighbours. While that level may be falling in relative terms compared to growth in some other markets, and it is always possible point to examples of companies whose main markets are outside of the EU, the European market remains critically important to Northern Ireland.

Borders

There is a major concern in relation to a new physical border emerging either across the island of Ireland or along the Irish Sea. Unless we see the softest of soft Brexits, with the UK continuing to more or less fully participate in the EU Customs Union and Common External Tariff and to preserve freedom of movement of people, there will be a difference between the trade and immigration regimes applying to the UK and to the Republic of Ireland. This will therefore need to be policed in some way. While there is a rhetorical commitment across all stakeholders about the avoidance of a hard-border on the island of Ireland, most experts believe that it is unavoidable. At present, the UK Government seems committed to taking control of immigration and freedom of movement issues, and leaving both the Single Market and Custom Union.

It has been claimed that as the Common Travel Area predates the accession of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland to the European Union, it can therefore survive the departure of those states from the EU. However, this argument neglects two key considerations.

Firstly, until now the UK and Ireland have moved in union around the key immigration and freedom of movement issues. Both states joined the EEC at the same time, and both opted out of the Schengen zone to rely instead on the Common Travel Area.

Secondly, opting out of Schengen was different from opting out of the core EU principle of the freedom of movement. The Common Travel Area should more readily be understood in terms of how freedom of movement within Europe and non-EU immigration is policed rather than the principle of freedom of movement itself.

With neither the Republic of Ireland nor the United Kingdom being part of the Schengen Zone, there are suggestions that immigration could be jointly managed by both states. In this regard, the approach of the UK Government has not fully appreciated and respected Irish autonomy and the perspective of the EU itself.

There have been some suggestions that the policing of the inevitable people and customs interface could be handled through electronic-based alternatives, or random checks on papers and paperwork.

If the UK Government in turn did try to police immigration through requiring employers, landlords, doctors, and others to undertake checks on paperwork, this additional bureaucracy would run contrary to the stated aim of the Leave campaign to reduce bureaucratic red-tape. This could also involve criminal sanctions for a range of people, and would not be a desirable development.

However avoidance of a people border, even if this approach to enforcement were desirable and/or feasible, would still leave the issue of a customs interface, if there is any meaningful difference between the UK and RoI in terms of the Single Market and Customs Union.

In terms of trade, it is worth noting that even between Norway and Sweden, with both being members of the Schengen zone, there is still a physical border to address the minimal differences between Norway's participation in the European Economic Area and the EU Single Market in which Sweden obviously participates.

Today, the border on the island of Ireland is largely a constitutional line to separate different jurisdictions but with little practical effect due to common regimes on trade and the freedom of movement for EU citizens.

The very real danger now is that the interface between different customs and immigration regimes will be either policed across the island of Ireland or along the Irish Sea; hard-nosed practical considerations may determine which approach is preferred.

Whichever option emerges will carry financial and economic implications in terms of limitations of choices, dislocation of activity and additional transactional costs.

But even more critically, a barrier in either respect will run contrary to the fundamental and balanced arrangements that underpin the Good Friday Agreement.

Whilst it is true that modern technology has very significantly aided customs administrations in facilitating legitimate trade, it cannot eliminate the need for physical examination of some freight. Import duties vary by the classification of goods and are often based on the value of goods. Even closely related types of goods can be subject to significantly different tariffs. Examination of selected consignments of goods, checking precisely what they are, and the quantity, is central to effective control. Periodic examination of accompanying paperwork such as invoices, bills of lading, and Certificates of Origin is also central to combatting customs fraud. After a hard Brexit, even with maximum goodwill, it is difficult to see how physical control can be avoided, unless a Special Status for Northern Ireland is negotiated. That too may raise significant challenges for the control of goods moving between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Political Implications

Brexit could undermine the Northern Ireland peace process and political stability.

Northern Ireland remains a divided society. While significant progress has been made over the past 20 years in the peace process with the support of UK, Irish Governments and US Administration, fragilities continue which have been highlighted by the current political crisis.

While strictly speaking and in a most literal sense, the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions may not be dependent upon the UK's or Republic of Ireland's continued membership of the European Union, the rights and privileges granted to people and companies under the EU facilities the opportunities for freedom of movement and reformulation of individual identities.

Albeit imperfectly, they have facilitated the political evolution in Northern Ireland over the past two decades and facilitated the option for people to operate relatively freely in a range of different frames of reference across these islands. Importantly, they have allowed the development of political pluralism and open, mixed and multiple identities.

Brexit, to a greater or lesser extent, will see the erection or return of some form of barriers, for people and goods.

The Good Friday Agreement can be seen as a balance between different spheres and dimensions: Strand I – internal Northern Ireland; Strand II – North-South; and Strand III – East – West.

Nationalists and others have bought into the current constitutional position of Northern Ireland on a pragmatic basis on the assumption of equality and the ability to live, work, trade freely on a North-South and East-West basis.

There are many aspects of the Good Friday Agreement that can be criticised, not least, the cumbersome approach to Executive formation and the institutionalised sectarianism around community designation. Yet at its heart, the Agreement has proven durable and been successful in that it creates the potential for Northern Ireland to be a shared space in which open, mixed and multiple identities can not only co-exist but flourish.

Notwithstanding the continued deep divisions in society and entrenched segregation in many aspects of public life, we have seen a gradual movement away from rigid and reinforcing approaches to identity where “Protestant=Unionist=British” and “Catholic=Nationalist=Irish”, to a situation where more and more people, especially young people will see themselves as both a little bit British and a little bit Irish, increasingly identify as Northern Irish, and also reference themselves as European.

Policing and Security

Northern Ireland is exposed to a broader terrorist risk than other parts of the UK, and has major problems with organised crime. The presence of the border on the island of Ireland, and the physical nature of that border with its many minor road and private crossing points, provides an opportunity that can be readily exploited by those involved in serious crime. Dissident Republican terrorists use the land border to frustrate counter-terrorism operations, while they and other organised crime gangs breach bail and cross the land border to avoid prosecution. The Chief Constable has voiced concern outlined the potential for organised abuse of the Common Travel Area as the immigration policy between the United Kingdom and Europe diverges.

A significant range of steps have taken in recent years to build up policing, security and criminal justice co-operation on the island of Ireland and across the European Union that has been significantly assisted by the mutual membership of the EU by the UK and Republic of Ireland. The PSNI has made clear that such arrangements enable them to provide a quicker, efficient and dynamic response to crime and criminality. The relevant measures include membership of Europol, access to the European Arrest Warrant, biometric exchange programme, the Schengen Information System, joint investigative teams and European Investigation Orders. These arrangements have allowed the PSNI to deliver significant operations against international organised crime gangs in relation to child sexual exploitation, firearms and cyber-crime.

While alternative mechanisms could be put in place, there is a danger that these could be less efficient and effective than the current arrangements, and unlike current arrangements may incur a substantial cost for the PSNI.

There is also the risk that the creation of a hard border provides new policing and related functions and indirectly creates a fresh security threat which endangers those involved which in turn creates a further requirement for policing and creates a further and associated danger for the personnel involved.

This spiralling security requirement would itself bring political consequences.

Case for Special Status

A 'One-Size-Fits-All' Brexit will not work for the UK as a whole, nor for Northern Ireland in particular. However, the choice is not between advocating some form of Special Status and accepting a one-size-fits-all Brexit. Rather the choice is between negotiating some form of Special Status or set of arrangements, or simply seeing Northern Ireland becoming some form of anomaly.

While the effects of Brexit would be more severe upon Northern Ireland than any other region of the UK, there are a number of particular features that make this region a special case:

- Northern Ireland voted to Remain in the European Union in the referendum.
- People in Northern Ireland have an automatic right to be Irish citizens, and therefore continue to be EU Citizens.
- Northern Ireland is a distinct political entity, with the right to determine its own constitutional status. Legally Northern Ireland would, post Brexit, have the capacity to opt back into the European Union through joining a united Ireland.
- Large aspects of our economy, for instance agri-food, are organised on a North-South basis.
- Agriculture and agri-food is much more important to Northern Ireland's economy than to the English economy, and our interests in this regard would not be accounted for in an overall UK approach to Brexit.
- The implications of where a physical border could be drawn and policed,.
- The threat to our political process and the corresponding need to protect the values and framework of the Good Friday Agreement.

The deep political divisions in Northern Ireland have been widened due to Brexit. It is likely that any restored Executive is not going to be politically sustainable without a shared approach to mitigating the effects of Brexit which is facilitated by the UK Government, the Irish Government and the European Union.

What Special Status Could Look Like

What is meant by Special Status needs to be developed further over the coming weeks and months by governments, political parties, the business community, academia and civil society.

The Northern Ireland Assembly, through an Alliance amendment, has already stated its support for continued participation in the Single Market.

Special Status could see Northern Ireland as a region remaining inside the European Union or outside with some form of special recognition. A full spectrum of detailed options and scenarios should be considered.

Some of the key issues to be resolved include:

- Management of the interface with the European Union on the island of Ireland, and the freedom of movement of people and goods.
- The potential emergence of a hard border, particularly in terms of customs, including the key issue of where border between EU and UK/GB is policed, i.e. across the island of Ireland or along the Irish Sea, and knock-on implications for Northern Ireland.
- Rights of EU Nationals.
- Movement of EU & non-EU Nationals, and their access to employment etc.
- Ability of Northern Ireland companies to access skilled labour.
- Future of mutual recognition of qualifications.
- Commitment to/position on the Four Freedoms (Workers, Goods, Services, Capital).

- Participation in/relationship to the EU Single Market.
- Participation in/relationship to the EU Customs Union/trading arrangement with the EU and rest of the world.
- Maintenance of full economic access to markets in Great Britain.
- The all-island Energy market.
- Continued access to EU Structural Funds.
- Continued access to competitive Funds, including ability to access funds in terms of eligibility and the ability to compete in terms of context, including Horizon 2020, Erasmus +.
- Future of/replacement of Common Agricultural Policy.
- Future of/replacement of Common Fisheries Policy.
- Policing and Justice challenges, including policing any hard border, participation and access to Europol, the European Arrest Warrant and other mechanisms of cooperation.
- Future of EU Regulation/Directives, and options for the Northern Ireland Assembly to determine future direction of travel distinct from Westminster.

For Alliance, a potential model for Special Status for Northern Ireland would include:

- Participation within Single Market.
- Participation within the Custom Union.
- Adherence to the Four Freedoms.
- Access to Structural and Competitive Funds.
- Rights to EU Citizenship for all born in Northern Ireland.
- Northern Ireland covered by EU regulations and Assembly control over EU Directives.
- The devolution model and balance of competencies otherwise continuing, with local taxes being paid to the UK Government; a UK Treasury financial subvention continuing; the UK Government handling non-EU Foreign Policy and Defence.



Economy and Skills

Our aim is to make Northern Ireland the most innovative and dynamic regional economy in Europe. However, to do this, we can no longer rely on what made us prosperous in the past. We must invest in the skills infrastructure and harness the creativity needed to ensure our economy is fit for the 21st Century. Improving our level of productivity is an essential part of any new economic approach.

Alliance believes that despite the challenges facing the economy, Northern Ireland has the resources to emerge from this period of austerity as stronger and more competitive. We have an enterprising and resilient business base; a youthful and well educated population; a strong manufacturing base; excellent research and innovation attributes; a world class telecommunications network; strong international links; and unique natural and cultural resources. Our strengths far outweigh our weaknesses. Taking advantage of these strengths will create the right conditions for growth and address many of the weaknesses in our economy.

A New Economic Approach

We need political agreement on a new economic approach. This should be underpinned through a new Executive Economic Strategy. There should be a united front and every Minister should be working towards delivering change. This will require political maturity and responsibility. We will:

- Ensure strategic and outcome-based approaches for economic development are included in the Programme for Government.
- Ensure the conclusion of the development of the inter-departmental economic strategy. This strategy should focus on job protection and creation in the short-term as well as set out a clear long-term strategy for increasing productivity and competitiveness that builds on our key strengths. A central element of this strategy must be a plan to invest in the key economic drivers such as skills and infrastructure in order to support a lower rate of corporation tax.
- Ensure that there is a strong manufacturing focus in a refreshed economic strategy, with a focus on advanced manufacturing, competing on quality and skills, and building upon the strong innovation base in local universities and colleges.
- Challenge the lack of a UK-wide regional economic strategy and support a legal duty on the UK Government to ensure its economic policies are assessed on their likelihood of reducing regional inequality in the economy.
- Invest in our economic infrastructure. Continued investment in Northern Ireland's infrastructure is critical to the future development of the economy.

Our infrastructure plans can be found in the infrastructure section of this manifesto.

Prosperity Panel

We recognise the need to further transform the Northern Ireland economy in terms of increasing productivity, raising employment levels, the creation of jobs, providing fresh opportunities, and tackling disadvantage.

There are fresh economic opportunities and challenges in relation to planning for: the successful implementation of the devolution of the power to vary the rate of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland; creating an internationally competitive economy; and, in particular, given the onset of welfare reform, to advance the most efficient and effective non-welfare related means for addressing disadvantage and marginalisation of people from the labour market.

To do this, Alliance will:

- Create a “Prosperity Panel” comprising a range of local and international experts, including representatives from the UK and Irish Governments.
- Ensure the Panel has particular focus on international best practice, including benchmarking Northern Ireland against other competitive countries and regions.
- Request the Panel to provide strategic advice to the partner governments to make periodic recommendations on policy interventions.

Attracting Inward Investment

In order to become the most competitive region in Europe, we must ensure that we offer the best possible environment for investors from abroad. This is more than simply lowering costs, we must also ensure they are confident in our political and security situations. Alliance will:

- Ensure that lower levels of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland are accompanied by a clear and sustainable plan as to how this would be funded. The Executive must also commit to a linked increase in investment in skills, innovation and infrastructure to ensure any out-turn is maximised.
- Campaign for Northern Ireland to remain in the EU’s Single Market and Customs Union.
- Ensure a targeted approach to inward investment which targets key industries and sectors that will support the growth of local business, build on our competitive strengths and create high value jobs.
- Continue to pursue reforms that deliver political stability and promote a culture of lawfulness. These are essential to attracting business investment from overseas.
- Ensure a comprehensive Tourism Strategy is in place, with associated investments and support.

Supporting the Growth of Local Businesses

One of Northern Ireland’s strengths is its entrepreneurial local businesses. These companies create jobs and much of their capital is retained by the local economy. In order to be the most competitive region in Europe, we need to ensure that our own businesses can compete. This will ensure that we can export to other nations, generate our own wealth and create local jobs.

Alliance will:

- Review business support infrastructure to ensure it is sufficient for its purpose.
- Continue to work with local banks and financial institutions to facilitate easy access to finance.
- Promote easier access to venture capital and ensure that Invest NI raises awareness of the equity funding market in Northern Ireland, across the business base.
- Streamline regulations in order to make them simpler for businesses and government to adhere to. This will include minimising and consolidating regulation. We will also support sensible measures, such as one-in-one-out rules and sunset clauses, to ensure regulations are fit for purpose.
- Ensure that efforts to control costs within the new Department and Invest NI allow maximum funding for supporting business.
- Develop a small and medium sized companies (SME) integration strategy. This should be developed to ensure that local SMEs are integrated into the supply chain of larger companies.
- Encourage greater export led growth with a commitment to increase exports to at least £8 billion by 2020.

- Support the development of incubation and cluster zones by working with businesses and local councils to identify suitable sites.
- Ensure the continued roll-out of high-speed internet to support small businesses.
- Addressing the issues of security of energy supply and energy efficiency which have a direct impact on the cost of running a business in Northern Ireland. A secure and sustainable energy strategy is important in this regard.

Small businesses are an important part of our business landscape and need different forms of support. We are committed to enabling them to succeed by:

- Developing a comprehensive strategy to rejuvenate high streets and town centres, and persuade the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce funding reforms where necessary.
- Working with councils to ensure that they establish a formal mechanism to hear the voice of businesses in their new community planning process.
- Supporting reform of the rates system, including the potential expansion of the Small Business Rate Relief and making it easier for businesses to set up in vacant premises and promote growth.
- Considering amendments to procurement rules that make it easier for small businesses to bid. Examples include: improving information available to applicants, tackling the complexity of the process and reducing the 'bundling' of procurement contracts.
- Ensuring economic policy is assessed for its impact on small businesses.

Social Economy

Alliance has long supported the social economy and social enterprises. They have an important role to play in regenerating our communities by providing skills, employment and building up social capital. In this regard, Alliance will:

- Push for a comprehensive approach to the social economy with a dedicated Social Economy Strategy. This strategy would recognise the work the community and voluntary sector does in areas such as welfare provision, skills provision and early prevention of social problems. It would also assist the sector with volunteer recruitment and access to sustainable funding.
- Examine other public finance arrangements which provide greater scope for social enterprises and development trusts.

Research and Innovation

In order to create a 21st century economy we must ensure that we have cutting-edge support for new industries. This means there needs to be the right set-up to support those businesses which rely on research and innovation. Alliance will:

- Set a target to increase investment in science and research through the UK Research Councils. Globally, there is a clear link between state investment in science and economic prosperity.
- Argue for Northern Ireland to retain access to the European Union's research funding in the event of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.
- Assist Northern Ireland's universities in drawing down greater levels of science and research funding from both the Research Councils.
- Audit scientific infrastructure in Northern Ireland and ensure any gaps are covered as part of scientific investment programmes.
- Continue to support the Horizon 2020 NI Contact Point Network.

Energy and Efficiency

Renewable energy needs to be championed in Northern Ireland. Alliance's view on this is simple – we need a varied mix of renewable energy sources contributing to our energy supply. Northern Ireland has an incredible opportunity in this regard; we have the second highest potential for energy generation through wind in Europe, as well as significant opportunity for tidal, biomass and geothermal energy production.

The current changes to the funding and legal arrangements surrounding energy policy in both Westminster and Northern Ireland have created an unstable and uncertain context for investors. Our first priority will be to eliminate that uncertainty.

Renewable Heat Incentive

Sadly, the recent revelations about the design and implementation of the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive scheme (RHI) have tarnished the provision of renewable heat in Northern Ireland. This is the largest financial scandal in the history of devolution and a public inquiry is essential. Now that this public inquiry has been established, we will:

- Support the completion of this report in a timely manner.
- Commit in advance to speedy publication of the report without any political interference.

It is also essential that we fix the problems with the RHI scheme and reduce the associated liabilities. We hope that preliminary regulations passed in January will begin to do this in the short-term, but we will also prioritise the development of a longer-term solution within the Executive. Our plan will look at options including:

- Examining whether EU regulations can be used to disregard payments where the heat is not 'useful'.
- Examining whether early entrants to the scheme can be moved to the most recent, lower tariffs.

Finally, Alliance remains an advocate of government intervention to support the development of renewable heat and other energy sources. One of the unspoken problems of the whole RHI scandal is the impact that this has had on investment in renewable energy. The RHI scandal does not undermine the principle of investment in renewable heat sources; it simply demonstrates the failure of the particular scheme in question. As part of our wider energy policy, set out below, we will continue to support those people who wish to switch to cleaner energy sources.

Energy policy

Alliance will cut carbon emissions through adapting Northern Ireland's energy generation. In particular we will:

- Create a long term, 40-year energy strategy covering all forms of renewable energy, to provide a clear 'road map' toward addressing the challenge.
- Introduce a Renewable Energy Bill to modernise the renewable energy market and ensure that investment in renewable energy in Northern Ireland is attractive to external investors.
- Ensure that there is a more coherent regime in place for securing community benefits from renewable energy development.
- Reduce the legal restrictions for micro-generation on homes.
- Invest in research and development for improving renewable technologies so that the amount of energy generated by technologies such as solar panels and wind turbines can be increased.

- Establish a body to assist with advice and funding support regarding small-scale community regeneration projects.
- Support the urgent development of the proposed North-South Interconnector.
- Introduce a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in Northern Ireland given our concerns about environmental and public safety concerns.

We are also committed to reduce our total energy use by investing in those measures which cut down on the energy needs of Northern Ireland. We will do this by:

- Prioritising energy efficiency measures which will provide low-cost and free insulation and home-heating measures. This will reduce fuel poverty and improve the economy.
- Building on the success of these energy efficiency measures by ensuring an effective fuel poverty strategy and improved efficiency targets for new builds. This will include a comprehensive approach to fuel poverty which includes insulation, efficient heating systems, oil-buying clubs, fuel-switching, benefits assessments and promoting better value forms of fuel.
- Renewing our efforts to create a zero carbon public sector estate.
- Rolling-out smart meters which have been shown to reduce energy use.
- Accompanying any change with a skills programme to ensure people are able to use this an opportunity to get into work.

Town Centres and High Streets

The recession has been hard on many local shopping and business districts and many streets in Northern Ireland now have a significant number of vacant shops. Alliance believes that if the economic recovery is going to benefit everybody, every community in Northern Ireland must be fulfilling its economic potential. This means that as well as investing in big projects, we must invest in town centres, high streets, local districts and urban villages.

Unfortunately, the high street will not be the same as it has been in the past and we will need to reconsider what we want it to look like. This will mean a mix of shops, cafes and restaurants, residential properties and non-retail businesses. This will help to ensure vibrant community economies despite trends towards out-of-town retail centres and internet shopping.

The strategy to develop town centres and high streets would include:

- Reforming business rates to make it easier for entrepreneurs to establish a business in vacant premises, such as scrapping business rates for the first year for a new business.
- Developing Business Improvement Districts, whereby businesses fund regeneration in their area through a levy on business rates.
- Bringing in other new and innovative models of funding and investment.
- Providing easier access for cars and public transport to local high streets and town centres, including promoting free short-term parking.
- Prioritising town centres, rather than out-of-town retail centres, as the preferred sites for retail and business development.
- Kickstarting wider government support for small and independent businesses, including business rates reform, improving access to finance and promoting entrepreneurship to young people.

Skills & Employment

Skills are a key driver of economic and social change in our society. They are central to increasing levels of productivity, and making our economy more open, flexible and competitive. They will facilitate the rebuilding and, especially, the rebalancing of our economy, most crucially in a more knowledge-based and export focused direction. Raising skills levels can lead to improvements in standards of living, and are therefore linked to decreased inequalities and to increased social mobility.

Demand is rising for higher-level skills, in particular for STEM and Management and Leadership.

As the provision of skills serves as the engine-room of the economy, it is important to maximise the efficiency of the economy through provision of skills at the right levels, matching supply with demand, and bringing as many people as possible into the labour market.

While over recent years there have been considerable improvements in skill outcomes, Northern Ireland is still characterised by its long-running structural problems of:

- Too many people with low or no qualifications, and lower overall skill levels compared to neighbouring jurisdictions and international competitors.
- Too many of our young people leaving education without the security of a full-time job or unable to find employment that utilises their training.
- Relatively poor levels of productivity.
- Workers receiving less training while in employment than any other region of the UK.
- The highest rate of economic inactivity in the UK, and the lowest level of economic participation.
- Structural problems with long-term unemployment.

Alliance is committed to building on the achievements of the past five years to meet Northern Ireland's estimated skills requirements of 2020, and to lay the foundations for further development over the following decade through to 2030.

These targets are to become more challenging in the context of a lower rate of Corporation Tax.

Alliance will advocate the development of an integrated Executive Plan to ensure that the supporting investments in areas such as skills, research and infrastructure are made to support a lower level of Corporation Tax.

To make this plan viable, Alliance is committed to investing at least an additional £85 million each year over the course of the next mandate of the Assembly. This will involve: addressing the funding deficits in higher education and investing for future demands; increasing the resources available to a business-focused Further Education sector; implementing the new Apprenticeship Strategy; and expanding the Assured Skills programme that directly addresses the needs of investors.

Alliance is committed to a review of the cross-Departmental STEM Strategy.

Alliance will also:

- Mainstream the Assured Skills Programme.
- Implement the outcomes of the DEL Review of Management and Leadership.
- Commit to the provision of a revised Youth Employment Scheme, and for fresh resourcing of the Pathway to Success strategy.

Apprenticeships and youth training

Alliance is committed to the implementation of the Apprenticeship Strategy. This involves ongoing engagement with employers and other stakeholders through the Strategic Advisory Forum and Sectoral Partnerships, to ensure ongoing creation and expansion of new apprenticeship opportunities in a wider range of occupational areas that lend themselves to professional or technical training, and at a wider range of skills level.

We will work to ensure that the new proposed Apprenticeship Levy works in the interests of local employers, and is directed towards the training needs of the economy primarily through supporting apprenticeships.

Alliance is committed to the implementation of the new system of Youth Training. An important element of this work will lie in engaging with both employers and young people.

Further education

Alliance is committed to the full implementation of the new Further Education Strategy. We will seek to consolidate the role of colleges, alongside other training providers, as the delivery arm for the new systems of apprenticeships and youth training.

Alliance will undertake a Review of Vocational Qualifications. This is now the logical next step to build upon the apprenticeships and youth training systems. It is important that qualifications are informed by, and relevant to, industry.

Alliance will support a strong 14-19 Statement in order to effectively bridge the interface between school and college, apprenticeships and youth training. In turn, there should be opportunities for children to access the facilities and type of training offered through colleges before the age of 16. It is also important that the Entitlement Framework provides a level playing field between school and college. It is important that schools and further education colleges are allowed to specialise in the areas where they have the comparative advantage.

Alliance also believes that the Further Education Colleges should be an integral and equal partner in area planning. This is essential to ensure that the entitlement framework can be delivered efficiently and effectively.

Alliance will support the further development of Higher Education being provided through FE Colleges, including, in particular, work-related Foundation Degrees. This will support the implementation of the Apprenticeship Strategy.



Higher education

Alliance will support the ongoing implementation of the Higher Education Strategy and the Widening Participation Strategy. In light of ongoing upskill requirements, it is important that provision will be increasingly informed by labour market information as provided, for example, by the Skills Barometer. Similarly, it is critical that all of the talents available to Northern Ireland are fully developed and that people are not deterred from accessing higher education.

In line with the Apprenticeship Strategy, Alliance will encourage the development of hybrid higher level apprenticeship/degrees. Within an apprenticeship framework, this would constitute combined part-time study with training in the workplace.

Alliance accepts that the current funding and delivery model for higher education in Northern Ireland is currently unsustainable. The party will work to achieve a viable financial solution that also preserves our strong track record on access. This outcome must be long-term and be backed by a strong political consensus. Alliance believes that tuition fees can continue to be frozen in line with inflation, provided that the Executive is prepared to address the resulting funding requirements. This involves addressing the structural funding gap with England, which amounts to approximately £40m per year, reversing the recent £16m cuts, and making the necessary additional investments to meet the needs of the economy which also amount to just under £30m. Consideration should also be given to the diversification of the traditional higher education model, and the identification of other potential sources of finance.

In addition, Alliance will:

- Work to facilitate greater access for local universities to research funding from UK Research Councils.
- Work to ensure that the forthcoming Teaching Excellence Framework being devised for England is sufficiently flexible to meet the different needs of the higher education system in Northern Ireland.
- Subject to the business case for higher education places being provided in Northern Ireland, support the expansion of Ulster University's Magee Campus.
- Deliver a single, integrated system of teacher training for Northern Ireland.



Employment law and relations

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK to which employment law and employment relations policy and practice is devolved.

While taking into account developments in Great Britain and the need on occasions for a common framework and approach, we have the capacity to shape employment law and relations policy to take account of the particular circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Alliance supports a collaborative approach across stakeholders including, in particular, business organisations and trade unions, to preserve generally harmonious relations in the workplace and to shape further changes in the law and future practice.

We are conscious of the need to make the process of resolving disputes less onerous and time-consuming for employers, and making it easier for employees to address problems. We do not believe that these objectives are contradictory.

Alliance believes in a hierarchy of interventions to address grievances and complaints in the workplace, starting with the dissemination of advice on good practice in order to prevent disputes, through the use of a range of methods of alternative dispute resolution, with, ultimately, the option of accessing a tribunal remaining available. Alliance will:

- Implement the Employment Act 2016.
- Following the outcome of the DEL consultation, support the passage of a range of changes to Tribunal rules to make them more efficient and effective.
- Use the powers in the Employment Act 2016 to introduce regulations on Zero-Hour Contracts (and Minimum Guaranteed Hours Contracts), including, for example, a Statutory Code of Practice and a right for a worker to request a normal contract in certain circumstances.
- Continue to oppose the application to Northern Ireland of the current Trade Union legislation being progressed in Westminster for Great Britain.

Respect for the rule of law, and efficient and effective policing and justice systems are central to a healthy, vibrant and shared civic society. Our policing and justice systems must:

- Be impartial, be seen to be impartial, and be free from any political interference.
- Work quickly and decisively to protect life and property.
- Reduce crime and the fear of crime.
- Provide fair and accessible justice without delay.
- Be sensitive and responsive to the needs of victims and witnesses.
- Reduce levels of re-offending by rehabilitating offenders.

The justice system cannot deliver the levels of reduced offending and re-offending that people want to see without the co-operation and support of the Executive as a whole. With a strong record of delivery in the Department of Justice from 2010 to 2016, Alliance will build on the reforms and improvements implemented during that time, introducing new measures and reforms, and developing new working partnerships across and beyond government, to make Northern Ireland an even safer community in which to live and work.

Continuing to Place Victims at the Centre of the Justice System

A key measure of any criminal justice system is how well it treats the victims of crime, and Alliance will continue to deliver measures to ensure that victims are placed at the centre of the justice system.

Alliance will go further in the implementation of the five-year Victims and Witnesses Strategy, delivering further support and protection for victims and witnesses, particularly those who are most vulnerable. This will include:

- The implementation, initially on a pilot basis, of Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders which will protect alleged victims of domestic violence from perpetrators for a period of up to 28 days, providing immediate emergency protection for victims and allowing them protected space to explore the options available in order to make informed decisions regarding their safety
- Legislation to criminalise 'coercive control' as has happened in England and Wales, and introduction of new legislation to protect and safeguard victims of stalking.
- The development of an appropriate model for identifying lessons learned and improving responses to cases of domestic homicide.
- Reform of the Criminal Damage and Criminal Injuries Compensation Schemes to ensure that those most seriously impacted receive appropriate compensation.

Building on the successful experiences in youth justice system, Alliance will develop and implement an Adult Restorative Justice Strategy, aimed at extending and integrating restorative approaches cross the whole of the criminal justice system, in association with key partners. At the heart of this Strategy is the desire to place victims front and centre; to develop appropriate structures and opportunities to allow victims to be involved, whether directly or indirectly, in the justice system and in decisions which affect them; and to improve outcomes for all those affected by offending behaviour, whether victims, perpetrators, or wider families and communities. The new strategy will align with the five-year Victims and Witnesses Strategy, and will involve:

- A review and expansion of the role of police discretion.
- A pilot of an adult model based on the Youth Engagement Clinics to determine what will work best for victims.

- Introduction and inclusion of restorative and/or reparative actions in pre-disposal reports.
- Building restorative practice into community and custodial sentences, and licence conditions.
- Maximising options for community reparative work through partnerships with the voluntary, community and social economy sector.
- Providing access and support to those victims of crime who wish to engage in restorative justice.

Tackling Crime, and the Harm Caused to Society

Alliance will continue to work at all levels of the justice system to ensure that offenders are held accountable for the crimes they commit. Alongside a continuing commitment to protecting as far as possible resources for front-line policing, we will continue to invest in training, forensic science and the latest evidence gathering techniques to ensure that offenders are brought to justice and to demonstrate that those who break the law will be pursued.

With significant progress being made in tackling anti-social behaviour, Alliance will place a particular focus on three other areas of criminality – domestic and sexual violence, emerging crime types (such as cyber-crime) and hate crime – to make people safer in their homes and on the streets.

Alliance will implement all of the justice-related elements of the new ‘Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy’. In addition, Alliance will conclude and act upon the current public consultation on a new domestic abuse offence that capture patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships, and on the introduction of a domestic violence disclosure scheme for Northern Ireland.

Alliance will also conduct a review of legislative measures in relation to tackling anti-social behaviour, to ensure that the suite of powers available are comprehensive, effective and proportionate.

Crime rates have been falling in recent years, but new crime types continue to emerge. Rapid developments in technology require rapid development of justice system responses. Alliance will ensure that an effective focus is placed on keeping legislation and practices up to speed with technological change.

Alliance will continue to argue that safer communities mean shared communities, and having placed the development of a shared future at the heart of the Department of Justice’s Community Safety Strategy, will continue to develop initiatives aimed at tackling division.

Alliance believes that we need to build shared communities where people live, work and play together in safety, if people are to live in real safety.

While the creation of shared communities requires a far more wide-ranging approach than the justice system alone can deliver, Alliance is determined that the justice system’s response to hate crimes must be robust and appropriate. Alliance will continue to work in partnership with agencies through the Hate Crime Action Group, and more widely, on initiatives to tackle hate crime; and provide practical support to victims under the Hate Incidents Practical Action Scheme.

Whether motivated by sectarianism, racism, homophobia or any other hatred, our response needs to reflect the impact on the individual victim and their family, and the wider impact that such offences can have on society, and recognise the role that strong messages of deterrence play in normalising our society. In order to inform a refresh of the Community Safety Strategy, Alliance will commission a review of the justice system's response to hate crime to ensure all that can be done is being done to reduce its impact on individuals and communities. Alliance will use the outputs from that review to inform the justice-related elements of a new cohesive and co-ordinated Hate Crime Action Plan for Northern Ireland, working in collaboration with the new Department for Communities, the Executive Office, and local councils whose new Community Planning powers offer a real opportunity to join-up actions between local government and the Executive.

Alliance has committed extensive resources to reducing the number of interface structures, and has so far achieved a reduction in the number of such structures from 59 to 52. Due to wider societal issues and tensions, community support for further reductions has proven difficult to achieve, therefore, Alliance believes a new approach should be considered. Working with the Department of Justice, the Ulster University has conducted significant research and engagement on this issue. This research has identified the need for improved political and community leadership on these issues; investment in interface areas; cross-departmental commitment; and the creation of a delivery model capable of addressing physical, community, economic and social renewal.

Alliance believes that all of these requirements could be achieved through the creation of a new body, outside of government but supported by it. This new body would take on the role of encouraging and enabling communities to work towards a future without walls. Based on the model used to successfully transform the Lagan-side areas of Belfast, the new body would be able to receive transferred capital assets and funds from Executive Departments, and to raise private funding, to facilitate work alongside local communities to regenerate interface areas and achieve the necessary confidence that would allow structures to be removed over time. Alliance will develop detailed proposals for such a body and bring them to the Executive for agreement.

Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime

With the first duty of any government being to provide for the safety of its citizens, Alliance has ensured, despite significant reductions in the Justice budget, that the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the wider justice system have been provided with the resources needed to tackle paramilitary groups. As long as the paramilitary threat continues to exist, Alliance will ensure that the necessary resources are made available to counter it.

For years Alliance has been advocating an Executive-wide focus on tackling paramilitarism in all its forms. Alliance made substantial proposals to other parties during the 2015 talks in relation to tackling paramilitarism. Alliance will ensure that the Executive delivers on commitments made to develop an Executive-wide focus on tackling paramilitarism. We will immediately produce a more robust and comprehensive response to the 'Fresh Start Panel' on paramilitarism. The Executive's current response was insufficient; containing no targets, timescales or funding commitments. This new draft will contain proposals for:

- Collective commitment across the Executive to tackling all paramilitary and organised crime groups.
- Collective, immediate and unequivocal criticism by elected representatives of anyone breaking the law or undermining the rule of law.
- Changes in how a number of areas of economic activity are regulated to prevent exploitation by paramilitary and organised crime groups.
- A shared commitment at both local government and Executive level to challenge paramilitary control of communities.

- A protocol on how the state and its agencies engage with actual or legacy paramilitary structures at community level.
- A zero tolerance approach to paramilitary marking of territory.
- A revised protocol on flags, murals and bonfires, with expectation of regulation, enforcement and prosecutions.
- The engagement of statutory bodies, schools and civic organisations in the development and promotion of a “culture of lawfulness”.
- A new mechanism to provide an ongoing independent assessment of paramilitary activity and the implementation of agreed strategies to tackle it.

Alliance will ensure that the recommendations of the Panel appointed to make recommendations on the disbandment of paramilitary organisations are acted upon. By maximising the impact of its policies across the justice, social and economic fields, the Executive can reduce and prevent paramilitary activity, deliver effective services and support, across all of the Executive's responsibilities to those communities at greatest risk of paramilitary exploitation, and reduce the risk of vulnerable young people being drawn into paramilitary activity.

Under the chairing of the Alliance Justice Minister, the Organised Crime Task Force had significant successes over six years. Alliance secured the delivery of the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland in a way that recognises and respects our particular policing arrangements. The Cross-Border Policing Strategy has been recently revised and a cross-border Joint Agency Task Force established. Alliance will continue to ensure that these and all other resources are used to tackle the organised crime in which paramilitaries are inextricably linked.

Using the most effective criminal justice approaches to divert, rehabilitate and reintegrate people who have offended, in order to make communities safer

Alliance has made significant progress in short and long-term strategies to reduce offending and re-offending.

During the previous mandate Alliance secured Executive agreement on a Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending, based on evidence of the factors that lead people into, and out of, offending behaviours. This Framework provides a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach for initiatives aimed at tackling the causes of crime; reducing opportunities to commit crime; diverting individuals from crime; punishing those found guilty of crimes; and reducing reoffending.

Alliance will continue to ensure that existing and new initiatives are delivered and developed in a strategic way, ensuring that the right interventions are provided at the right time. Building on the Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending, the Prison Reform programme and the Desistance Strategy, Alliance will:

- Continue to implement long-term reform of the Prison Service, focussed on five key areas: leadership; a diverse workforce; purposeful activity for prisoners; effective partnership with healthcare providers; and a fit-for-purpose prisons estate, delivered through a ten-year capital programme.
- Target the desistance-related resources of the Prison Service on employment and skills, health and well-being, family relationships and mentoring.
- Develop a Social Enterprise strategy for the Prison Service, aimed at addressing employability barriers for people leaving prison.

In recent years Alliance prioritised the examination of how the criminal justice system impacts on the young people who come into contact with it, and made significant changes to lessen the extent to which it damages their life-chances. Alliance will continue to identify groups for whom contact with the criminal justice system can have particular impacts, beginning with a focus on women. Similar to the scoping study recently carried out in relation to young people, Alliance will commission a scoping study to:

- Consider how the justice system could be improved to address the many and complex needs of the women who come into contact with it.
- Make proposals on interventions that are timely, proportionate and effective, and which can lead to improved outcomes for women, victims of the crimes they commit, their families and the wider community.
- Examine how support can be provided to reduce the risk of women coming into contact with the justice system as a preventative measure.

Evidence shows that short sentences are less effective in reducing re-offending, while having disproportionate long-term impact on offenders' family relationships and their prospects of securing employment. Prison sentences also cost significantly more than community sentences and tie up resources that could be used more effectively in reducing crime and targeting the most prolific re-offenders.

Alliance therefore believes that short sentences should only be used as a last resort, and where community safety requires it. In order to ensure that the most appropriate and effective prison and community sentences are available to, and being used by, the judiciary, Alliance will undertake a review of penal policy in Northern Ireland. This review will:

- Examine alternatives to custody, discretion, diversion, and restorative practices.
- Take account of the development of an Adult Restorative Justice Strategy for Northern Ireland.
- Based on international practice and evidence, make recommendations on the use of a statutory presumption against short custodial sentences, where there is low risk to society by having an offender serve a sentence in the community rather than in prison.
- Make recommendations on the most appropriate structures to deliver effective supervision of young and adult offenders in the community.

Developing the Youth Justice System

During the previous mandate Alliance commissioned a review of Northern Ireland's Youth Justice System and, while resource constraints and lack of political consensus prevented full implementation, Alliance delivered on many of the review's recommendations. Determined to make further progress, Alliance initiated a further Scoping Study, bringing together experts from across Government and from within the voluntary and community sector to examine how the Executive could deliver greater benefits for children in, or on the fringes of, youth justice.

While the Youth Justice System has made significant progress, the overall system of government segregates the needs of children and young people into Departmental responsibilities, addressing each symptom that leads to offending behaviour – misbehaviour and absenteeism at school; problems in the family home; mental health issues; homelessness; and offending behaviour – independently, rather than holistically. If these reasons are not addressed, then the child gets further entrenched into the justice system, which is not in their best interests, or in the interests of society.

Alliance will implement the recommendations arising out of the Scoping Study, including:

- Ensuring that children who offend are speedily held to account for their actions, but within a welfare system which meets their multiple and complex needs, and provides the opportunity for them to repair the harm they have caused, and become re-engaged in normal society.

- Ensuring that each child who offends is provided with an intervention which addresses their needs, re-engages them in normal society through education and family support and, crucially, does so without long-term negative consequences for their future life prospects.
- Increasing options for diversion at police stage with referrals to social services, education welfare, addiction and mental health services.
- Developing alternative accommodation models to reduce the juvenile detention centre to its intended purpose.
- Introducing a “real prospects” test to ensure that only those children who have a real prospect of receiving a custodial sentence are detained on remand.
- Replacing the multiple current court-ordered community disposals with a single, flexible order that can be tailored to needs and behaviour of individual child/young person.
- Replacing the current custodial orders with two new orders – one for serious offences that would be available for anyone over the age of criminal responsibility and the other for less serious offences that would apply only to those over the age of 14.
- Revisiting the criminal records regime for young people, including the development of a new restorative caution for minor offences that would not attract a criminal record.

Further action to make the justice system faster, fairer and more efficient

Alliance made major strides in speeding up the justice system, making it more efficient, and addressing factors that prevent people accessing the system in ways, and at times, that they need it most. But Alliance is determined to do more. Building on legislation delivered by Alliance during the previous mandate, Alliance will:

- Introduce ambitious Statutory Time Limits, giving the criminal justice system a specified time to progress a criminal case.
- Establish a new approach to fine-collection and tackling default. With Alliance proposals already agreed to by the Assembly, the new approach will deliver a civilian service for fine collection, free up police time and resources for front line duties and, by reducing the numbers of prison committals for fine default, allow prison services to be better targeted at more serious offenders.
- Develop and implement a programme of work in response to the second review of Access to Justice. This programme will deliver a legal aid scheme, which will be narrower than the current scheme but with access to justice widened in other ways, giving greater control with far more sustainability in the longer term, and safeguarding access to justice for the most vulnerable members of society.
- Introduce processes to ensure that civil claims are dealt with in the most appropriate court tier, in a timely manner and consistent with complexity of case; to encourage resolution of civil cases using less court time; to provide online resolution tools for civil and family cases; and to promote the use of mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution in civil and family cases.
- Introduce portable disclosures (legislated for by Alliance during the previous mandate, and ready for implementation as soon as the UK agency responsible is able to deliver the service to Northern Ireland), and review the new filtering scheme to ensure that it is striking the right balance between public protection and allowing people to move on from their offending behaviour.
- Commence new legislative measures such as committal reform, statutory case management and live-links to court appearances to further reduce delay.
- Continue the courts reform programme. This will mean courts operating at fewer locations, but will free up savings for elsewhere in the justice system.
- Review and reform the law relating to bail, with the intention of legislating on this in the next Assembly term.

Delivering truth and justice for legacy victims, while freeing the justice system to deal with the challenges of today and tomorrow

Alliance has long advocated a new approach to dealing with the legacy of Northern Ireland's past. Alliance has refused to support the "Fresh Start" Agreement because it failed to deliver for victims, and remains committed to establishing and supporting all of the legacy institutions proposed in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement.

Alliance proposed the principles set out in that agreement which should guide the Executive and the British and Irish governments as they deal with the past, as follows:

- Promoting reconciliation.
- Upholding the rule of law.
- Acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims and survivors.
- Facilitating the pursuit of justice and information recovery.
- Human rights compliant.
- Balanced, proportionate, transparent, fair and equitable.

Alliance remains fully committed to these principles, and will work to ensure they are adhered to.

Alliance will work with other parties to establish the following institutions and services:

- An Oral History Archive to provide the opportunity of a central place for people from all backgrounds (and from throughout the UK and Ireland) to voluntarily share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles. The Archive will be independent and free from political interference, and be complemented by a factual historical timeline and statistical analysis of the Troubles, produced by academics.
- The delivery of high quality services for victims and survivors, respecting choice and need, and including comprehensive mental trauma services, a pension for severely physically injured victims, and access to advocate-counsellor assistance.
- A new independent, Article 2 compliant, Historical Investigations Unit to take forward investigations into outstanding Troubles-related deaths, including outstanding cases from the Historical Enquiries Team process and the legacy work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.
- An Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the Troubles-related deaths of their next of kin. This Commission would not disclose the identities of people who provide information. No individual who provides information to the body will be immune from prosecution for any crime committed should the required evidential test be satisfied by other means.
- An Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG) to oversee themes, archives and information recovery, with the promotion of reconciliation underlying all of its work. The IRG would encourage and support other initiatives that contribute to reconciliation, better understanding of the past and reducing sectarianism.

The Implementation and Reconciliation Group was an Alliance Party proposal, based on its analysis that the process of dealing with the past will inevitably involve exposing or reopening many wounds and cause disruption for many. Alliance therefore argued, and continues to argue, that it is vital that a space is created, which is formally part of the structures to deal with the past, with the capacity to respond to issues resulting from the investigations or information recovery.

Alliance believes the IRG should fulfil a number of critical functions:

- First, it would have an oversight role monitoring the implementation of the other aspects of the institutions for dealing with the past, issuing annual reports on progress in and highlighting where additional or corrective action would be required. Additionally, the IRG would engage informally with the governments and the Northern Ireland Executive on an ongoing basis to ensure sufficient progress is being made.
- Second, recognising that the evidence to prompt a thematic analysis could emerge from a number of different processes, including the Investigations Unit, the Information Recovery Unit and the Oral History Archive, the IRG would be asked to identify and analyse themes arising from any and all of the elements of the package of measures.
- Third, it would play a crucial role in facilitating reconciliation. While a comprehensive approach to securing truth and justice in relation to the past is an important step on the path to a fully shared and reconciled society, it will not in itself achieve that reconciliation. Indeed, the process of securing truth and justice will inevitably involve exposing or reopening many wounds. It is therefore vital that a space is created, which is formally part of the structures to deal with the past, to examine and reflect on the emerging themes arising from these structures, and the substantial body of academic study on the divisions within Northern Ireland and beyond that are a legacy of the troubles. That legacy includes divisions in attitudes and in Northern Ireland's education, housing, and planning provision.

Based on its examination and reflections the IRG would make recommendations to the two governments and the Northern Ireland Executive on further actions that it considers would assist in progressing reconciliation and the objective of a shared community.



Education

Alliance regards education as a key investment for society as a whole, and for the future development of our economy. A first-class education system supports every person to develop to their full potential. The ongoing debate on the structure and effectiveness of our education system is one of the most important facing our society today. It is vital that decisions are based on what is best for our children and our society rather than based on party political positions.

Integrated Education

Education in Northern Ireland continues to be provided at primary and secondary level on a predominately segregated basis. By contrast, in most other parts of Europe, and further afield, a single, integrated public education system is the norm. The demand for integrated places far exceeds those available. Polls suggest an overwhelming level of support across the population for integrated education, yet the formal integrated sector remains small.

Integrated education, and to a lesser extent some of the approaches to shared education, carry significant educational, financial, economic and social benefits. Integrated education can deliver a range of financial, social and educational benefits, including:

- Reducing the cost of maintaining around 70,000 empty school places.
- Directing funding towards pupils rather than the maintenance of the school estate.
- Allowing children to explore their identity and culture while learning about other identities.
- Making it easier to improve the quality of education and, therefore, address inequalities.

Recent years have seen the development of shared education (where two or more schools share facilities but do not fully integrate their pupils). There are currently a range of models in which children from different schools can interact, including some with shared teaching time. Alliance is clear that shared education is preferable to segregated education, but that any move towards sharing must be accompanied by significant amounts of shared teaching and contact time. It should also be easy for shared schools to merge into a single, integrated school. Schools which do not facilitate this do not meet any reasonable definition of “shared”.

Alliance believes that every child should have the choice and option of attending an integrated school.

The next Executive needs to make a very clear commitment to integrated education. The opportunity to move in this direction is provided by the new Education Authority and with the creation of appropriate legislation, with an Integrated Education Act.

Alliance advocates the following nine-point plan to expand the provision of integrated education:

- Government should continue to support the creation and maintenance of new-build integrated schools.
- Government should set a minimum target of 20% of children being educated in integrated schools and 40% in mixed schools within the next ten years.
- The duty on the Department of Education should be strengthened to promote, not merely to encourage and facilitate, the development of integrated education must be better enforced, and this duty must also extend to the Education Authority.
- Where new schools are being built, for example, to service new housing developments, the Department should survey local residents regarding a presumption that they will be integrated or mixed. As far as possible, new schools should be sited to service mixed catchment areas.

- Government should encourage the transformation of existing schools to integrated status. A complete review, consultation and rewrite of the transformation legislation is important here.
- Government must reform and relax the criteria for the creation and maintenance of integrated schools, giving recognition to those children of mixed, other or no religious background.
- Government should give formal recognition to the contribution being made to the process of reconciliation by 'mixed' schools: those with a mixed enrolment but not formal integrated status.
- Government should set a minimum number of shared learning hours and contact between schools in a shared facility.
- Government should pursue the rationalisation of the existing fragmented teacher training provision into a word-class, financially sustainable, and integrated system.

There must also be dedicated funding available for the facilitation of integrated education. This must include the facilitation of new schools but also the transformation of current schools into integrated schools. This funding will be self-sustaining because of the financial savings associated with de-segregating the education system.

Following the 2016 Assembly election, Alliance representative Kellie Armstrong introduced a private member's bill on Integrated Education. Kellie Armstrong consulted widely with a number of educational stakeholders and interested parties and the bill had been warmly received by supporters of integrated education and received over 800 consultation responses. Alliance is committed to pursuing its own integrated education legislation in the next mandate.

A Comprehensive, Quality Curriculum

Alliance is committed to ensuring that pupil-centred learning and quality advice and guidance are fundamental aspects of our education provision. We all learn differently and our education system must reflect individuals learning needs and preferences.

We believe that it is important that all children should progress to study a common, middle school curriculum, for the first three years of post-primary education. Importantly, any existing school could provide this middle-school education.

Our education system must include adequate provision for technical, vocational and academic educational choices. Pupils should be free to "mix and match" vocational and academic subjects.

In order to refresh the curriculum, we will:

- Fully deliver the new 14-19 strategy and the development of a greater mix of academic and vocational pathways, and linkages to DEL initiatives on youth training and apprenticeships.
- Fully deliver the Entitlement Framework to ensure that students have full access to a range of learning and development options.
- Undertake a full and comprehensive review of the curriculum to ensure that a wide-range of academic and vocational options is available.
- Invest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) within schools and advancement of pupils' awareness of these subjects is important from an early stage. We will aim especially to increase uptake amongst female pupils.
- Provide a wide range of computer programming training available in schools at all levels.
- Promote entrepreneurialism and business skills in schools.
- Update policy for schools to ensure interaction and joint learning with, rather than being taught about, young people of different religions. We would also support this requirement with funding.

- Introduce age-appropriate sex and relationship education (SRE) in schools.
- Teach first aid in schools so that more people have knowledge of these emergency and lifesaving skills.
- Provide financial education in schools.

Supporting Pupils to Achieve

One of the biggest challenges in the education system is making sure that the benefits of a quality education are available to everyone. This means that regardless of someone's background or perceived ability, they must be given the same chance to succeed. We are deeply concerned about the underperformance of pupils from poorer backgrounds and pupils with disabilities. This requires a range of direct and practical interventions to remove those existing barriers to success. Our interventions would include:

- Investing in programmes to tackle poor levels of literacy and numeracy, starting with those schools with the highest need.
- Investing additional funding for children on free school meals in order to tackle underachievement. This could be funded through savings made by the development of integrated education.
- Providing programmes of intensive family support services for those most vulnerable children and their families.
- Supporting the right of children with disabilities to attend a school that is appropriate for them, whether mainstream or special needs.
- Providing a consistent programme to improve the accessibility of schools for pupils who have lower mobility.
- Ensuring that pupils with Special Educational Needs can access a clear and legally-binding process for specified provisions for the pupil.
- Supporting Early Years through new legislation and re-balancing funding towards this important sector. Evidence shows that many inequalities are exacerbated in the first few years of schooling. This would be alongside continued funding and roll-out of SureStart services.
- Reviewing the support available for lower-income pupils who may have affording school uniforms or other equipment.
- Providing ongoing support and training opportunities for teachers to ensure full inclusion of all children within the classroom.
- Assisting with removing communication barriers and support the work of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Academic Selection

Alliance welcomed the end of the 11-plus tests, a system which perpetuated inequality and labelled children as failures at an early age. We do not believe that eleven is the appropriate age to make educational decisions that will restrict later choices.

However what has replaced it is arguably worse. We believe that the system of unregulated transfer tests should not be allowed to continue; it places an unfair burden on children, teachers and parents.

What replaces the 11-plus has stirred some of the most heated arguments but little action has been taken to achieve a solution that is acceptable to all. Successive Education Ministers have failed to engage effectively on this matter and instead opted to ignore calls for talks.

In the next Assembly we will:

- Continue to work to build consensus between the parties in a constructive and non-confrontational approach.
- Make the case for non-tested selection within schools at age 14.

Structures and Buildings

The future of the school system in Northern Ireland must be underpinned by a robust and evidence-based process for planning school provision in the future.

Any new approach to planning will need a rationalisation of the school estate. The pupil should always be at the centre of the school estate and not buildings. Rationalising the school estate should take into account what is best for our children and young people. The current system has allowed the education budget to become heavily skewed towards maintenance and running costs of buildings. We believe that it is more important to invest in the needs of pupils. Resources need to be directed toward educating pupils and assisting teachers rather than maintaining a divided system and an under-utilised school estate.

However, Alliance wants to ensure that any rationalisation is carried out on the most effective and sustainable basis. We are very concerned that rationalisation is currently being carried out on a piecemeal basis within sectors rather than on a cross-sectoral basis, thereby missing opportunities for more sustainable reform.

The recent establishment of a single Education Authority represents the opportunity to start a new and more strategic area-based process to planning school provision. We want to make sure it does so by working to develop a series of comprehensive area-based plans to ensure a cross-sectoral approach including a range of integrated school provision across Northern Ireland.

Childcare

The delivery of quality, accessible and affordable childcare is essential for early years child development and for the education, training and employment opportunities of parents. It enables parents, especially women, to return to work. Alliance will develop affordable childcare opportunities by:

- Continuing with dual-provision of childcare vouchers and childcare payments, ensuring both are available to new applicants.
- Increasing the tax-free allowance for childcare and the number of hours of free childcare available.
- Encouraging the Northern Ireland Executive to promote the uptake of UK-wide child care schemes by citizens in Northern Ireland.
- Advocating a refreshed Childcare strategy which ensures the annual budget is spent well, encourages the growth of Sure Start centres and promotes wraparound care and other flexible options.
- Acknowledging the additional challenges for parents of twins and other multiple births and providing additional support.

Health and Social Services

Our health and social services are going through the greatest period of change and challenge for many years.

We are witnessing huge advances in technology, treatments and drugs. We have the welcome development of people living much longer.

At the same time, there remain some very persistent health problems, including poor public health and a significant proportion of our population with mental health issues.

The current approach to health and social services is not sustainable. Under the current service delivery model, the system is struggling to meet existing and future need. Alliance welcomed the publication of the 'Bengoa' report as a sensible way forward when it came to reform – rationalising our health institutions and releasing additional funding for services.

There are major headline problems in relation to the scale and length of waiting lists, particularly in certain specialisms as well as massive pressures on Accident and Emergency services, and an uncertain future for residential homes. In addition, there are restrictions on people accessing certain treatments and drugs, and the underfunding of some critical areas such as mental health.

The central challenge remains how to facilitate, and effectively deliver a high performing health and social service alongside pursuing the necessary reforms while also retaining the support and confidence of the people of Northern Ireland. In this regard, it must be clearly understood that health is more than just hospitals but involves a wide range of interventions that are focused around promoting well-being.

Some key values and principles underline the Alliance approach to health policy. As all persons are of equal worth, respect for individual autonomy and dignity is critical. Treatment should therefore be patient-centred, taking into account the different requirements that people may have and allowing them to be active participants in their care. **The Health Service should remain universal and free at the point of use.**

Our vision is of an effective, world-class system of health and social care, with a focus on: prevention and early intervention; access to the most modern diagnostics, treatments and technologies; providing community-based solutions where possible; and a preference for locally-accessible services supported by acute hospitals that deliver excellence.

Alliance also recognises that health outcomes lie in a cross-Departmental and cross-sectoral approach that addresses social inequalities, promotes public health, provides educational and employment opportunities, and focuses on public safety. Greater investments in these areas can often deliver a greater return than direct investment in health and social services.

Financial Context

Health and social service spending in Northern Ireland absorbs almost half of the entire Executive budget.

Nevertheless, spending in Northern Ireland is now falling behind that of all other UK regions, having previously been ahead.

Under the current service delivery model without reform, meeting the rising demand in the health service would involve an annual budget increase in the region of 5%.

Alliance is committed to maximising the resources directed towards the health sector from within the Northern Ireland Budget. In parallel, attempts must be made to achieve efficiencies and to make the reforms necessary to address the healthcare needs of the future.

We welcome much of the protection that has been given to health and social services in the Northern Ireland budget; we believe it is right to make health a priority. However, full protection of the health budget would entail almost doubling the cuts in every other Department, with implications for many other public services. In this instance, the inefficiencies that currently exist within the health system would continue without being properly addressed.

Reform of Health and Social Services

Alliance accepts that the status quo is not sustainable, and that reform must be pursued.

Alliance will continue to support a Health Service, universal and free at the point of use.

However, the time for endless reports into how to achieve this reform is over. The publication of the Bengoa report should light the way for the long-needed reform of our health services. Its proposals are significant and have expert backing, but often such suggestions draw local or internal opposition when they are actually implemented. That is why a cross-party approach is preferable to the lack of transparency we have seen so far from the Executive. It is essential vital reforms are able to proceed.

The next Health Minister needs to provide determined leadership to deliver reform and communications properly across all parties, all departments and all sectors, and most importantly, with users of the health service themselves.

Progress cannot once again be fudged. There is excellence across much of the health service but what is now required is a more effective system to ensure that excellence is experienced by everyone accessing it.

A key aspect of the Bengoa report is a greater emphasis upon primary care and services in the community. However, this endorsement is not unqualified and we are concerned over the slow pace of change and the flow of resources, in particular, that there is a sufficient shift of funding into community-based interventions.

Some of the key reforms to delivery that could provide better outcomes more efficiently include:

- Reducing reliance on accident and emergency services – too many people, due to a lack of awareness, use A&E as an alternative to visiting their GP, using an out-of-hours doctor or visiting a minor injuries unit. Supporting interventions around public information, effective signposting and diagnostics need to be in place.
- Directing patients to the appropriate level of response in the health service as efficiently as possible.
- Placing a stronger emphasis on prevention and early intervention and the use of the community and voluntary sector.
- Focusing on improving public health (quality of diet, exercise, smoking, etc.) to ease demand and cost pressures.
- Facilitating the better use of technology, for example, to support people in their homes; to monitor and manage prescriptions; and to deliver remote care.
- Seeking a greater emphasis on improved home and community services.
- The further development of shared services or access to very specialist treatments or facilities on a north-south, or at times east-west, basis.
- The use of generic drugs rather than branded drugs.

The Donaldson Report has now identified further opportunities for reform, including the commissioning process and the review of infrastructure issues.

Alliance recognises that a significant imbalance lies in the proportion of the health budget that is spent on facilities at the expense of patients.

Alliance recognises the importance of providing local access, where practical, to the widest range of services, and preserving local facilities for current or alternative use as far as possible.

However, this must be balanced with the need to achieve economies of scale in relation to access to the very best equipment and technologies, and to allow clinicians to maximise their skills in some specialism through having a critical mass of relevant patients.

Any reconfiguration of services should be preceded through better facilitating of travel for both patients and visitors, including the provision of an Air Ambulance, and greater use of tele-medicine.

Alliance believes that there is a strong case for full benchmarking of the profile of health and social service expenditure in Northern Ireland against other neighbouring jurisdictions. There are areas where Northern Ireland will be shown to be spending proportionately more than other regions and some areas where we are spending much less. Such an analysis should guide further spending priorities as the local budget is rebalanced.

Commissioning should be guided by effective planning rather than being a procurement exercise.

Alliance supports the implementation of an approach to health service transformation on an evidence-based approach, which is consulted on locally. This will enable a hospital system that delivers excellence and provides local access to those services which should be delivered locally.

Our priorities for re-directing that investment include reducing waiting lists and investing in social care and mental health provision.

Public Health

Alliance is committed to addressing public health issues as a means of narrowing health inequalities and preventing the onset of conditions, thereby easing the demand and cost pressures on the health service. This should be accompanied by a greater focus on preventative medicine in terms of regular health-checks, targeted, where possible, at those from at-risk groups.

Environments which promote a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet should be created across the education, employment and transport sectors. For example, safe environments for cyclists and pedestrians should be promoted. More information can be found in the Infrastructure section of this manifesto.

Obesity is a major public health problem, which creates increasing demand pressure on the health service.

Alliance will:

- Support the continuation of the Public Health Agency in order to bring a focal point to these interventions.
- Implement the Obesity Prevention Framework.
- Encourage cross-departmental and cross-sectoral action to tackle the underlying socio-economic and mental health issues to provide support for people wishing to lose weight.
- Introduce measures to increase transparency in relation to food labelling.
- Introduce measures to discourage smoking, including controlling where smoking can occur, and to regulate the sale of tobacco products.
- Increase the availability of information and testing services for STIs.

Alcohol and Drug Misuse

Alliance recognises that alcohol and drug misuse is much more than a health issue and is a societal issue. It is one of the biggest public health issues in Northern Ireland. In human terms, hundreds of people die each year and serious liver disease is now being detected in young people due to excessive alcohol consumption. Underlying socio-economic health inequalities need to be addressed. Alcohol and drug misuse places an enormous financial burden on the health service, including accident and emergency units. More widely, it is closely associated with a high percentage of criminal offences, including domestic violence.

Alcohol misuse impacts upon the economy and the life opportunities of individuals affected. Alliance will address this by:

- Continuing to support a Minimum Price for alcoholic drinks of 50p per unit. We will monitor the outcome of any appeal by the Scottish Government to assess the legal situation.
- Initiating a comprehensive review of the current availability of support services, treatment pathways and commissioning of drug and alcohol.
- Working to ensure alcoholic drinks display their calorie and sugar content.

Mental Health

The Alliance Party believes that Mental Health should be placed at the core of the public health agenda.

Mental health conditions affect a considerable number of people in our society, with around 1 in 4 people facing such issues at some stage in their lives, and around 1 in 5 people being affected at any one time. Not least, given the legacy of the Troubles, mental health conditions are more prevalent in Northern Ireland than in neighbouring jurisdictions.

While there has been some rebalancing of mental health expenditure from acute inpatient services towards the delivery of services in the community, mental health services are still underfunded in comparison to services for physical illness, and continue to be considerably underfunded by comparison to UK mental health services.

Emphasis on mental health as central to the public health programme will facilitate people to adopt healthy lifestyles and reduce health-risk behaviours. This shift will allow prevention of physical illness and promote mental health and wellbeing across the life span. Physical illness risk is increased with incidence of mental illness and vice versa.

Mental well-being has an impact across the social, health and economic spheres including education, employment, social inclusion, physical health, recovery from mental and physical illness, self-harm and suicide risk, participation in public life and the criminal justice system. Tackling the stigma and discrimination which is still associated with mental illness must be made a priority throughout society.

As the number of older people in Northern Ireland continues to grow there will be an increasing need for appropriate mental health services including equity of access to high quality primary care and community-based services.

The historical and current underfunding of child and adolescent mental health services also needs to be addressed, and resources invested in addressing issues such as eating disorders.

Self-harm and suicide, including the high rates of suicide in young men, must be tackled by addressing issues such as socio-economic inequalities, the legacy of deprivation from the Troubles and the effects of the recession, and by providing early interventions for families in disadvantaged communities. Improved follow-up support for people who attempt suicide, or who have suicidal ideation, through co-ordinated crisis care and enhanced additional care models. With every suicide being preventable, Alliance supports a zero suicide target.

Social deprivation and economic inequalities are known determinants for mental illness and physical illness. These health inequalities impact on mental health causing transgenerational mental ill-health and physical illness which creates a vicious cycle leading to further inequality.

The incidence of mental health issues in Northern Ireland has been heavily influenced by the legacy of violence and division over recent decades. There is considerable need for mental health trauma services in Northern Ireland to treat trauma related to past and current events, transgenerational trauma and staff suffering from secondary trauma.

Alliance will:

- Support the ongoing implementation of the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability.
- Appoint a Champion for Mental Health.
- Support ongoing multi-disciplinary evidence based care for people who are vulnerable to severe mental illness and their carers.
- Place psychological therapies at the core of the mental health services agenda and support the Psychological Therapies Strategy.
- Fully implement the Personality Disorder Strategy.
- Facilitate the rebalancing of health spending to support mental health investments, and bring spending to at least the equivalent level of spending in the rest of the UK. This includes investment in particular into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Psychological Therapies.
- Fund the physical health needs for people with mental illness.
- Work to eliminate stigma and ensure dignity and respect of people with mental illness.
- Support the implementation and ongoing review of the Executive's Protect Life Strategy to combat suicide. This involves a cross-departmental response and improved follow-up support for people who attempt suicide, or who have suicidal ideation, through coordinated crisis care and enhanced additional care.
- Introduce a Suicide Prevention Bill, bringing in a zero suicide target, a duty of candour on trusts and other measures to prevent suicide.
- Implement the Mental Capacity Act.
- Support the implementation of a Mental Trauma Service, to help address the mental health legacy of the past, which is mainstreamed across the health service.

Learning Disabilities and Difficulties

Alliance supports the full implementation of the 'Equal Lives' report arising from the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability. The views of people with a learning disability and their carers should influence policy across all departments.

Services should include a full range of respite care options, which are available to those with a learning disability and their carers when needed, and enable people with a learning disability to have an enjoyable and beneficial time. Young people moving from children's to adult services and their carers should be better supported and access to a full range of activities, training, employment and leisure opportunities. People with a learning disability should be supported to live in their family homes or, if they wish, supported in appropriate housing within or close to their community.

Alliance will:

- Provide of better day opportunities for people with a learning disability, including retention of day centres, with a specific emphasis on transport needs.
- Support ongoing delivery of employability-related programmes through the use of the European Social Fund.
- Support the ongoing implementation and review of the cross-departmental Action Plan on Transitions for Young People from School to Adult Services that had previously been co-ordinated by the Department for Employment and Learning.

- Work to eliminate stigma and ensure dignity and respect for people with a learning disability.
- Fund the treatment of physical health needs of people with a learning disability.

Autism

The Alliance Party supports the Autism Act. The views of people with autism and their carers should influence policy across all departments.

The full range of appropriate services and easy access to mainstream services should be available in a timely on-going manner, in particular, within health and education for children with autism.

Sufficient investment is required to improve access to support services.

Alliance supports awareness training for staff and the public, in all settings, and believes earlier detection, intervention and support would enhance the experience of people with autism and their carers. Agreed referral and care pathways are required which should include seamless transition between child and adolescent mental health and adult mental health services. Support systems for parents, families and other carers are crucial and should include resourcing for parent groups.

We also acknowledge the need to provide support for adults with autism, who are sometimes left without specific support.

Physical Health

Alliance is committed to improving services providing treatment for physical illness with particular priority being given to the major causes of disease and death in Northern Ireland such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease.

Cancer

Earlier cancer detection is a priority. Increased public awareness, uptake of cancer screening, access to new and existing means of diagnosis and cancer research should be supported. It is vital that Northern Ireland has speedy access across the life span to cost-effective top-class surgery, radiotherapy and medicines including new advances. Alliance will:

- Fully implement of the Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care.
- Create a Comprehensive Cancer Strategy, addressing prevention, early detection, treatment and support for research.
- Support parity of treatments and access to treatments with those available in the rest of the UK, including equity of access to drug treatments.
- Provide Equal access to Clinical Nurse Specialists.
- Ensure the Recovery Package is available to every patient progressing through and beyond treatment for cancer.
- Promote of the use of Advanced Care Planning for people approaching end of life.
- Support the Head Smart Campaign for awareness of brain tumours.

Cardiovascular and Respiratory Health

Alliance believes that secondary prevention measures should be supported such as a comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation service and access to heart failure nurses across Northern Ireland, thus reducing costs of readmissions. Emergency Life Support (ELS) skills training, first responders services and static defibrillators should be available throughout communities. Alliance supports:

- The full implementation and monitoring of the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework.
- Public health initiatives to underpin prevention of respiratory disease.

Strokes result in over 1,000 deaths per year, and cost our economy over £250 million per annum.

Alliance will work to ensure the full implementation of the Stroke Strategy, including timely access to treatment, specialist services including stroke units for all stroke patients and an increase in stroke rehabilitation services. Prevention should include following the NICE guidelines on the management of atrial fibrillation.

Long Term Conditions

Alliance supports the need for recognition of the impact of long term conditions and the call for a relevant strategy to include the issues of individual conditions, self-management and management of chronic pain. This work is urgent as there will be a substantial increase in need over the years ahead.

We support empowerment of people with long term conditions to live independently, remain in employment, enjoy health and well-being, and be at the centre of service development.

Health and social care provision should include coordinated services, support, nurse specialists and seamless care transitions. Alliance supports action to reduce the inequality, exclusion and poverty experienced by many people living with long term conditions including access to financial advice and benefits.

Alliance endorses the continued long-term funding for Northern Ireland's muscular dystrophy Care Advisors. Equity of access to education, employment, and public transport must be ensured for people of all age groups with muscle disease.

Neuro-physiotherapy, access to appropriate treatments and drugs, and a full range of respite choices should be available to all people with neurological conditions. Alliance also endorses the creation of a MS Neurological network. Research into the high rate of MS in Northern Ireland should be supported.

Rare Diseases

Alliance is committed to providing high quality care and support to people in Northern Ireland who have one of the many different types of rare diseases. We call for people with rare diseases to have the right to a second opinion by, or referral to, a specialist centre in that disease, plus diagnosis and treatment, and information on the relevant patient support groups. Awareness raising for GPs is also important. This care pathway should be available whether the specialist centre or support group is within or outside of Northern Ireland. Access to a single care co-ordinator should also be ensured. Alliance is committed to the delivery of the Northern Ireland Implementation Plan for Rare Diseases.

Children's Health

The importance of placing emphasis on child health and paediatrics is currently being overlooked due to competing pressures in health and social care. Investing in prevention and early intervention for children will provide a health trajectory for better health outcomes in adulthood. Areas which should be addressed are infant, child and youth mental health, obesity prevention, well-being programmes in schools, enacting legislation to ban smoking in cars where children are present, and restricting access to alcohol. Furthermore, a regional paediatric network should be established, paediatric and child health experts represented on any health forum, paediatrics and child health services included in RQIA inspection programmes, implementation of both the 'Facing the Future' Standards for acute paediatrics and child health, and promotion of child health research. A reduction in child mortality could be assisted by the establishment of a Child Death Overview Panel to ensure that knowledge is disseminated to allow lessons to be learned. With respect to child health inequalities, Alliance would implement the Child Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland without delay. The voices of children and young people should be included in development of services.

Women's Health

Alliance supports the ongoing development of specialist interventions and services for conditions that primarily or exclusively affect women. This includes sufficient investment and ease of access to prevention and early detection of conditions.

Alliance supports the ongoing development of maternity services that will provide state of the art infrastructure and evidence-based care to optimise the health, safety, equality and well-being of all women and babies, and is committed to the implementation of the Northern Ireland Maternity Strategy. Care should include locally accessible antenatal care, appropriate advice and support at all stages, sufficient perinatal mental health services, increased provision of midwife care for women during and after the birth and the reduction of perinatal ill health due to inequalities. Midwives should have an integral role at strategic level and provide midwife-led care options throughout Northern Ireland, and greater attention needs to be paid to workforce planning given the current age profile within the profession. We will also support pay parity with midwives elsewhere in the UK.

Men's Health

Alliance supports the call for a Men's Health strategy to promote early intervention for men, including accessing mental health services. In particular, there is a need for better understanding and interventions relating to the particular risks of and the increased rate of suicide among men.

Alliance supports the full implementation of the Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy and all hospice care in Northern Ireland. We support an adequate funding stream for this sector to allow services to be planned for, which will benefit the majority of the population, especially with an aging population. We are concerned that too many people are missing out on palliative care. It is important that a Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy for children is implemented and supported by appropriate levels of funding. We support the right of people to be involved in decision-making in relation to their care and the right to dignity.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Waiting lists

Alliance is deeply concerned at the crisis around waiting lists. It is very disappointing that we are seeing waiting lists increasing, when we should be seeing waiting lists falling as a consequence of progressive reforms. Indeed, with the level of funding allocated to the Department over recent years and a reduction in waiting lists being a focal point for the current reform agenda, this is a very troubling situation. Delays have a very real impact on the quality of life, the well-being and indeed the life chances of many people. The situation with respect to waiting lists goes to the heart of public perceptions of confidence in the health sector.

Alliance will:

- Move to the introduction of Referral to Treatment Time targets. This would provide greater transparency and greater accountability.
- Advocate greater use of technology, and better management of appointments, including cancellations. Problems with cancellations do not solely arise from patients not turning up but from the health service itself cancelling appointments for various reasons.

Accident and emergency

Alliance will support measures to divert patients into other forms of treatment, where appropriate, to free up pressures on Accident and Emergency services. Further investments and publicity around Out-of-Hours GP services and Minor Injury Units are required. Alliance also supports special systems to fast-track/separate seriously ill patients such as terminally ill cancer patients who are at specific risk of infection and suffer greatly from trolley waits. Increased psychiatric liaison and availability of psychiatric assessment should be available, as well as the 'Card before you leave' scheme for at risk patients.

Intermediary care

Alliance is aware that the lack of intermediary beds causes problems within our health service, including the inability to discharge people from A&E services leading to 'bedblocking' and the use of trolley-beds. Reform of the NHS must ensure that there is adequate supply of intermediary beds. This will enable people to leave A&E more quickly. It will also allow people to return to hospitals nearer their home when their care needs lessen.

Air ambulance

Alliance supports the provision of an air ambulance service for Northern Ireland.

Prescription charges

Prescription charges were abolished in Northern Ireland in April 2010, at a cost of up to £30 million pounds in lost resources. If small charges were to be reintroduced, it is estimated that just 11% of the population would have to pay, but this would still have the potential to generate a significant sum of money. In particular, this could be used to support investment in a wider range of drugs and treatments, and addressing problems of inequality of access between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. **Alliance will support the re-introduction of a small charge for those able to pay for their prescriptions: children, senior citizens, pregnant women, people in receipt of benefits and those with chronic/long term conditions/illnesses will be exempt.**

Dentistry

Alliance is committed to securing access to NHS dental care for all and supports advice and prevention programmes to tackle the poor oral health in Northern Ireland. The views of the British Dental Association must be integral to the future shaping of dentistry delivery which should include adequate resourcing and increased training provision. The economic input of family dentists as small businesses must be acknowledged. The special care required for vulnerable patients, including the elderly and those with disabilities, should be recognised and adequately resourced.

Organ donation

Alliance will support a soft-opt out approach to organ donation. There should be a well-resourced and organised system for organ donation and public campaigns promoting both organ and tissue donation are required.

Research and development

Northern Ireland is a world leader in life sciences and medical-related research. Priorities for research and development need to be identified in collaboration with clinical, and academic health and social care professionals in the statutory and voluntary sectors, and appropriate resources provided to ensure Northern Ireland has access to future cost-effective interventions. Alliance will support efforts to access better funding for health-related research, including retaining access to the European Horizon 2020 Programme and maximising drawdown from the UK Research Councils.

Social Services and Social Care

Alliance believes that significant opportunities exist in Northern Ireland from the delivery of health and social services through a single department in contrast to other jurisdictions.

Within the context of a single Department however, it is important that social services and social care are adequately resourced and are not neglected due to resources being concentrated on acute hospital services.

Social work

Alliance believes that social work must be adequately resourced to ensure protection of vulnerable children and adults.

Adoption legislation

Alliance will support legislation to provide a long overdue update of Adoption Law in Northern Ireland. This has now fallen behind the rest of the UK and is potentially out of step with various pieces of recent domestic equality legislation and European human rights standards. The Department of Health has not followed through on the outcome of the 2006 consultation “Adopting the Future”. This updated bill would ensure uniformity across statutory agencies; set clear standards in terms of quality; put in place eligibility criteria that reflects the norms of modern society; place the child at the centre of the process; recognise the needs of those involved in adoption; and establish a full range of options for permanent families.

Social care

Alliance is further conscious of the inadequate system of social care for our senior citizens and also those with long-term conditions.

Many older people will be able to continue leading full and active lives. However, with the demographic profile of society changing and more people living longer, the pressure for social care issues is certain to increase. By 2030, there could be over 130,000 people over the age of 80.

Social care can be provided in a range of settings. Alliance wants the system to enable as many people as possible to remain in their homes and in their communities, and to be able to receive the full range of care needs and support in that context.

Early intervention, prevention and a holistic approach to lifestyle can have a positive impact on the need for social care. By contrast, a reduction in support for social care would have knock-on implications for the health service, at higher cost, with respect to emergency admissions, waiting lists and bed-blocking.

Alliance has a longstanding commitment to free personal care for those in residential or nursing homes. It is wrong that people are forced into selling their homes to fund their care. Alliance will promote the uptake of direct payments to those who are able and willing to use them.

Alliance will also work to end short, 15-minute visits from care workers in domiciliary settings. There is a mounting body of evidence that short care visits are inadequate.

Alliance will further support the Northern Ireland Dementia Strategy. We support: independent advocacy for people with dementia and their carers, and dementia awareness training and access to timely information for all staff, users, carers and the public. Personal care should be available to all people with dementia.

Staff and Other Service Providers

Alliance values the dedicated work of all health and social care providers in the statutory, and the voluntary and community sectors.

We believe that service providers across all sectors need to be included in collaborative strategic discussion of the most cost-effective way to deal with workforce planning and bringing their direct experiences to bear on wider strategic issues, while maintaining a high quality service for the people within their care. Alliance is conscious of the need to address a range of workforce and pay issues across the broad range of health professionals, including doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals, alongside technical and support staff.

Medical doctors

Alliance believes that the views of all doctors including GPs, consultants, staff grade and associate specialist doctors, medical academic doctors and junior doctors must be integral to future planning and delivery of services. Professionals should be allowed to provide leadership on clinical matters. Medical education and continuous professional development of a high quality must be available in Northern Ireland.

GPs will be central to the delivery of a greater emphasis upon primary and community-based care as envisaged under Transforming your Care. As more and more functions are directed towards them, greater efforts are required around workforce planning, including facilitating the necessary growth in specialities to meet increased demand, and supporting innovation. GPs should also have the opportunity to spend more time with patients. A failure to sufficiently invest in and support GPs will have knock-on consequences elsewhere in the health service.

Nursing

Alliance is committed to ensuring that there should be appropriate numbers of nurses and health care assistants in all health and social care settings to allow for safe, individualised and dignified patient treatment and care. Sufficient nursing training and professional development should be available in Northern Ireland to provide a high quality workforce in the future. At present, there is a shortage of nurses. Therefore, student support should be orientated in such a way as to encourage more people into the profession.

Allied health professionals

Alliance will give a greater role to allied health professionals to make health and well-being interventions. They should also be more central to integrated workforce planning. We welcome the decision to allow for direct self-referrals to physiotherapists.

Pharmacists

Alliance supports the integral role of community pharmacists in the provision of health and social care.

Community and voluntary sector

Alliance recognises that the community and voluntary sector is often better placed than the statutory sector to provide some services more efficiently and effectively. Such organisations therefore play an important role in the delivery of health and social services. Alliance is committed to the continued use and resourcing of the community and voluntary sector. Much of this work is focused on early intervention and prevention, and can avoid greater cost pressures being faced within the system.

Carers

Alliance acknowledges and supports the invaluable service provided by over 200,000 young, adult and older carers across Northern Ireland, many of whom themselves have health conditions or disabilities. In economic terms carers provide a value of service which is almost equivalent to the entire health and social services budget. Government needs to address the structural underfunding of social care, and to improve the financial support for carers. They need to be identified by health and social care providers across all sectors so that they can easily access a full range of high quality services including psychological therapies. Carers of all ages should be at the centre of planning, development and evaluation of these services which require inherent flexibility. Access to relevant information should be available at all points along the care journey.

Communities, Arts and Sport

Alliance wants to work within communities to promote opportunity and tackle poverty. At the moment, division compounds poverty and lack of opportunity. Radical transformations are needed to ensure our communities are thriving. We will promote a high quality of life in Northern Ireland's communities.

This will require an approach which both supports the most vulnerable and enhances opportunities for everyone. The new Department for Communities will be at the heart of this agenda.

Welfare Reform

Alliance did not support the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which drastically reduced benefits for a whole range of people. We also oppose the new cuts proposed by the Conservative Government.

However, we have always accepted that Northern Ireland is not in a financial position to run its own, independent welfare system. Benefit claimant rates here are too high, and the local tax base too small, for a separate Northern Ireland benefits system to be affordable. Furthermore, we do not have the economies of scale for a standalone computer system to administer a separate system of benefits. We have always been realistic about making affordable changes to the benefits system to ensure that it is fairer than the system used for the rest of the UK.

We are also opposed to the recent changes proposed by the Conservative Government in Westminster. We are particularly concerned about proposals around child benefit. We are also concerned that proposals around disability benefits and tax credits which were recently dropped could be brought back in other forms.

We will continue to argue for a fairer UK-wide benefits system as this will have the greatest impact on what we are able to afford in Northern Ireland. We base our approach to the welfare system on: the principles of support for the most vulnerable in society; simplicity for the recipients of payments; the need to tackle poverty; ensuring that potential benefit traps are eradicated; and providing support and opportunities for people to escape from a reliance on benefits. Alliance will support, as a minimum, the following changes to the welfare system:

- Continuing to avoid the bedroom tax.
- Implementing an easier process for scrutiny and transparency of any private companies responsible for medical assessments for welfare by both legislation and procurement.
- Opposing onerous obligations being placed on people who are in receipt of benefits
- Opposing a lower rate of benefits for younger people.
- Paying housing benefit directly to landlords.
- A wide-range of opportunities for recipients to re-skill or re-train.
- A 'yellow card' system for benefit sanctions which would allow recipients the opportunity for an explanation and the introduction of more stringent requirements before a sanction is considered.

Alliance believes it is crucial to help people back into work through education, skills, employment support and delivery of an economic inactivity strategy. We believe that, as well as having a set of Northern Ireland-specific mitigations for welfare reform, there is a need for a comprehensive strategy to tackle poverty in our society. We were dismayed when OFMdfM Executive Office failed to produce an anti-poverty strategy, and was found by a Judge to have failed in its duty to do so. Alliance will:

- Continue a focus on the particular unemployment issues facing young people, including provision of a revised Youth Employment Scheme.
- Provide tailored interventions to assist the long-term unemployed.
- Advocate for a cross-departmental anti-poverty strategy to reduce poverty across our society.
- Adequately resource this strategy, using funding from the discredited Social Investment Fund.

Pensions

Alliance is committed to pension provision which enables older people to live independent and dignified lives. We have worked to reduce the incidence of pensioner poverty and we support many improvements to the state pension system such as:

- Moving to a position where a pension is paid on the basis of meeting residence requirements rather than solely on the basis of contributory requirements.
- Supporting an annual uplift, which is linked to inflation, prices and earnings, whichever is the highest.
- Taking independent, objective analysis on the issue of the national pension liability, age of eligibility and how this affects long-term funding arrangements.

We will continue to support automatic enrolment into workplace pensions. We have supported recent changes to ensure that private pensions will be offered to all employees in the next few years.

The government is also responsible for providing pensions to its employees. As a result of the recent financial situation, there have been a number of changes to public sector pensions.

Alliance will seek to balance the need for sustainable finances with the need to ensure people have a dignified retirement and time to adjust to any necessary changes in their pension provision.

Building and Improving Homes

Housing is essential for a good quality of life. Without a home that is both safe and of a high quality, people experience a detrimental impact on their health, life opportunities and security. Alliance is committed to ensuring everyone living in Northern Ireland has access to a suitable home. In order to improve the quality of housing in Northern Ireland, we will:

- Prioritise energy efficiency measures which will provide low-cost and free insulation and home-heating measures. This will reduce fuel poverty and improve the economy.
- Build on the success of these energy efficiency measures by ensuring an effective fuel poverty strategy and improved efficiency targets for new builds. This will include a comprehensive approach to fuel poverty which includes insulation, efficient heating systems, oil-buying clubs, fuel-switching, benefits assessments and promoting better value forms of fuel.
- Ensure housing standards provide for sustainable and well-built houses.
- Develop a public land register to ensure sites suitable for housing (either private or social) are identified.

- Develop an Empty Homes Strategy to bring derelict and unused properties back onto the market using legislative proposals and a sustainable funding model to allow revenue from houses brought back into use to be allocated to future houses.
- Urge the UK Government to abolish VAT on all renovations and repairs to existing buildings so that houses can be repaired and refurbished at the same cost as building new homes.
- Introduce legislation to improve the regulation of the private rented sector, focussing on increasing security of tenure, improving standards in poorer homes and reducing up-front fees.
- Introduce a regulatory mechanism for letting agencies.
- Support independent housing advice services.
- Introduce legislation relating to the management of apartment developments to address current inadequacies in the laws governing aspects of the ownership of certain types of private properties which comprise part of multi-unit developments as well as the management of any designated common areas.

Social Housing and Preventing Homelessness

Social housing has always been an essential part of our housing infrastructure and is a key public service. We will further improve the provision of social housing by:

- Ensuring any proposed reforms to social housing provision do not jeopardise fairness, quality or diminish equality of access.
- Urgently seeking a derogation from proposed rule changes to housing association reclassification.
- Working with NIHE and housing associations to identify new land for housing development.
- Continuing to provide revenue funding to support sheltered and supported accommodation.
- Providing Housing Associations with the flexibility needed to provide community infrastructure in larger social housing developments.
- Working towards a situation where no families with young children are housed in high-rise social housing.
- Developing a positive public understanding of the role of social housing.

We believe it is critical that the following safety nets are put in place to help homeowners and tenants locally. A number of measures are necessary, including:

- Aiming to eradicate homelessness and facilitating multi-agency working to meet this target.
- Seeking to support householders when their homes are at risk of repossession to stay in their homes, by examining the feasibility of a Preventing Possession Fund similar to those in operation in Scotland and England.
- Providing access to independent advice for people in mortgage/rent arrears, including emergency help at court proceedings.
- Requiring fee-charging debt management companies to demonstrate quality assurance by subscribing to their industry's codes of practice.
- Strengthening the Pre Action Protocol for Mortgage Arrears proceedings to ensure all reasonable options to avoid possession are considered thoroughly.
- Introducing similar Pre Action Protocols for social housing rent arrears possession proceedings to ensure eviction is always a last resort.
- Examining the role of Discretionary Housing Payments for people at risk of eviction because of housing benefit cuts.

- Adopting a positive approach to the assessment of homeless applications from people at risk of repossession as a consequence of debt.
- Making affordable credit facilities more accessible (e.g. by encouraging new initiatives involving social housing providers and credit unions).

Shared Housing

All housing – as well as the streets and all public space within every residential area – must be accessible and welcoming to all, irrespective of background, without any risk of intimidation or threat. In practice, however, segregation in housing continues to represent a significant barrier to the growth of a more united community.

People's decisions over where they live should be made based on location of the provision, not on fear of living elsewhere. We must work to remove 'fear' as factor within peoples' housing choices.

Alliance is committed to the following actions:

- Setting and delivering a target to remove all evidence of threat, intimidation and exclusive claims to territorial monopoly, by any group or cause. Mixed and shared housing, at all income levels, must be considered normal throughout the region.
- Robustly condemning attacks on the homes of people from religious or ethnic backgrounds or on the basis of sexual orientation. There must also be support for victims and active engagement with communities in order to improve levels of integration and cohesion.
- Commissioning a landmark Shared Housing Review of housing provision in Northern Ireland undertaken by a commission of experts to produce detailed recommendations by 2018.

Specifically, the Shared Housing Review will include recommendations on:

- Actions to be taken over the next 25 years to eliminate discrimination and exclusion.
- The development of shared neighbourhoods and housing which is genuinely mixed.
- Measures to ensure that a commitment to promote and facilitate mixed housing can be translated into a formal duty upon housing authorities.
- Any legislative instruments required to produce and underpin change.
- Structural and behavioural changes in public agencies required to manage change in housing provision, including removing the de facto maintenance of some housing areas as single identity.
- Measures to design new housing developments to maximise the potential for sharing.
- Interventions to effectively market new housing developments as shared.
- Steps to ensure the protection of minorities and action to eliminate hate crime directed against resident minorities.
- Changes required from agencies responsible for policing, community safety, local government, education, social amenities and community development to support changes.
- Training and support for housing managers and other relevant professionals.
- Monitoring and evaluating change.

While the primary focus of the report is discrimination on the basis of race, religion or political opinion, the commission will be encouraged to bring forward recommendations which ensure that it also applies to all other areas of potential exclusion.

Regeneration and Shared Space

All public space in Northern Ireland should be open and shared, however, evidence shows that fear affects our basic choices such as where people live, what they wear and where they access basic public services. It is essential that we actively seek to create and foster shared neighbourhoods, workplaces and public amenities.

The Executive must work towards safe and open access to all public space in Northern Ireland. No-one should be afraid to go anywhere. It is important to recognise that shared space does not mean neutral space, rather a place where everyone can celebrate their identities in a vibrant, inclusive manner.

In order to achieve this, Alliance will:

- Require that decisions on future public investment take account of whether assets can be shared and open to everyone.
- Require that planning policies and community planning make specific proposals to increase shared space.
- Ensure good relations are a specific aim of regeneration and community planning.
- Aspire to remove of all interface barriers over time, in collaboration and partnership with local communities. Further detail on our proposals to do so can be found in the Justice section in this manifesto.
- Take a strong line against the use of symbols, emblems and other displays which mark territory.

The new councils should be responsible for regenerating their communities. As the body charged with local economic development, they will be able to ensure that regeneration is focussed around local priorities. We want to see a broad range of regeneration functions being conferred on local authorities. Alliance will:

- Reverse the DUP's decision to stop transfer and implementation of the regeneration powers and pass them on to councils as soon as possible.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the councils in delivering under the new regeneration framework.
- Use the Northern Ireland Local Government Association to spread best practice in relation to regeneration between Councils.
- Ensure there are replacements for EU regeneration programmes in the event of a UK withdrawal from the EU
- Reform our outdated licensing laws in order to develop a modern approach that meets our leisure, tourism and economic needs. This will include giving greater flexibility to local brewers and cider producers in Northern Ireland to invest in and grow their businesses

The Arts and Culture

The government has a role in promoting culture and the arts. This allows us to develop creativity amongst our society. There is also a wide body of evidence that investment in arts and leisure has significant benefits for individual wellbeing and for our economy.

Alliance supports investment in arts and leisure at all levels. In order to make sure this investment is sustainable under current funding pressures, we will:

- Commit to raising arts spending to at least the average spend on arts in these islands per capita, and review how to ensure that this spending effective.

- Establish an Arts Funding Review to examine if this funding can be directed in a more sustainable manner. Specifically, we would ask it to examine the historic underfunding of the arts compared to other nations in these islands. We would also ask the review to examine more sustainable funding arrangements such as; three-year budgeting, endowments and improving business models within arts and cultural organisations in key areas such as financial management, fundraising, marketing and audience development.
- Adopt a specific strategy to improve access to the arts by sections of the community who have lower-than-average uptake rates.
- Develop a formal protocol to ensure that sectarianism, racism or any other form of prejudice does not occur at artistic and cultural events funded by public money.
- Establish an integrated strategy for cultural tourism. This strategy must provide a full appreciation of the unique cultural heritage we have to offer, and how these can be developed, managed and projected to a wider audience.
- Ensure that Northern Ireland's art and culture is promoted globally. Countries such as the Republic of Ireland and Scotland have successfully used increased global visibility of their arts and cultural output as part of a wider package to raise their international profile.

Sport and Leisure

Sport and physical activity have a role in promoting health and wellbeing, both physically and mentally, while promoting cohesion among communities, and boosting tourism.

Participation levels are among the lowest in the UK and steadily declining, the consequences and cost of this to society are large and unacceptable – it is estimated that that around 2,000 deaths a year can be attributed to physical inactivity.

This has a knock on effect on the cost to our health service. The 'Investing for Health' report states that obesity is estimated to be causing around 450 deaths each year with a cost of around £500 million to the economy.

Alliance will tackle the current decline in physical activity and promote a healthier Northern Ireland by:

- Promoting healthy living and physical activity across a range of public services including through PE lessons in school, a comprehensive approach to walking and cycling infrastructure, and working with local councils to upgrade leisure facilities.
- Promoting grassroots sports by investing in appropriate facilities and ensuring sports facilities are exempt from business rates.
- Setting targets for increased uptake, especially amongst those sections of the community that are particularly low in participation, such as women, people with disabilities, and people from areas of social disadvantage.
- Supporting bids for major sporting events to be held in Northern Ireland where the infrastructure exists.
- Accepting the potential that sport can be a driver for reconciliation. As part of this we will support community relations programmes which reduce the tendency for some sports, or structures within sports, to be dominated by one part of our community, or which aim to reduce sectarianism, racism, homophobia or other hatred within sports.

Voluntary Action and Active Citizenship

The voluntary and community sector is a vital part of Northern Ireland's communities. It is also becoming an increasingly complex sector, which is involved in delivering public services as well as other philanthropic roles. The time has come to ensure our government structures are in place to support the voluntary sector and promote an active role in communities for those who want it. Alliance will do that by:

- Producing a public consultation on Active Citizenship and Volunteering to help make the most of these activities.
- Providing clearer advice on procurement for voluntary and community organisations. This will be alongside the procurement reforms laid in the Finance section of this manifesto.

Languages

Alliance recognises that the Irish language is part of our shared culture and heritage, and that it is spoken and respected by all sides of our community. Its status in Northern Ireland should go beyond simply a practical count of the number of speakers and its use to public services. It must also acknowledge the rich cultural heritage of the Irish language and the need to promote its appreciation and celebration.

Sadly, the Irish language has been politicised and it's very disappointing to hear disrespectful, and outright offensive, characterisation of the Irish language and its speakers. Some politicians also seem to be using the Irish language as an excuse to taking us back to the days of "never, never" unionism. Others have politicised the Irish language by conflating its use with particular political aspirations.

We recognise the need for legislation to protect and promote the Irish language. We are open to negotiation with other parties about precisely what should be contained in this legislation, including; visibility of the language, accessing some services in the language where this is reasonable and ensuring people are able to learn Irish. We also recognise that some forms support for the Irish language can be funded outwith any legislation.

As a result, **Alliance supports legislation for the Irish language.**

As well as these proposals for the Irish language, we support the development of a comprehensive languages strategy. A comprehensive language strategy would cover indigenous languages and other spoken languages used within Northern Ireland, as well as various sign languages. Elements of this strategy would include:

- Legislating to create a duty on public bodies to develop language schemes that meet the identified needs of their user base.
- Supporting the development of Ulster-Scots Heritage.
- Recognising and supporting the development of British and Irish Sign Languages.

Local Government

Alliance was a strong proponent of the reform of local councils, which reduced the number from 26 to 11 and conferred new powers on them over issues such as planning and regeneration. This has the potential to allow local communities to respond to their own needs and will ensure that local voices are heard on appropriate matters.

In order to ensure that the new councils, which assumed their powers on April 1st 2015, are as effective as possible, Alliance will:

- Reverse the DUP's decision to stop transfer and implementation of the regeneration powers and pass them on to councils as soon as possible.
- Oversee the implementation of the remaining powers to be devolved as soon as possible, including in particular urban regeneration.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the power-sharing framework.
- Audit the effectiveness of the new councils' plans for community relations to ensure this vital area is not dropped.
- Establish a credible Register of Members' Interests which amongst other things can allow for the monitoring of donations from property developers to elected representatives in respect of planning decisions.

Local Alliance councillors will pursue our aims on their councils, but an overview of our proposals can be found in our recent local government manifesto, available at <http://allianceparty.org/document/manifesto/alliance-2014-local-government-manifesto.pdf>



Environment and Agriculture

Alliance is a pro-environment party. We believe that man-made climate change is real and has potentially disastrous consequences for human existence on earth. We also believe that agriculture, biodiversity and animal welfare are part of our natural heritage. It is essential that all regions, and nations, work together to reduce carbon emissions and develop solutions that will mitigate the impact of climate change.

Protecting our environment is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Radical reforms are needed to make sure Northern Ireland contributes to this global mission. This will include reducing carbon emissions, conserving the environment and supporting sustainable agriculture. We believe that a thriving farming sector fits hand-in-hand with a sustainable economy and environment.

We are deeply concerned that Northern Ireland is slipping behind its moral and legal obligations on the environment. Significant action needs to be taken to make sure that we can pass the world on to future generations in the same condition we inherited it.

The new, single department will provide Northern Ireland with an opportunity to develop policy that harmonises both agricultural and environmental policy. This will benefit both. However, we are worried that it would be very easy to subsume environmental concerns into a new department and, therefore, momentum on environmental protection would be lost. Alliance will work to ensure that environmental concerns are not secondary in the new Department.

Climate Change Framework

We believe that governments of all levels across the world will need to ensure that they have the correct processes in place for addressing the challenges of climate change. To this end, Alliance supports:

- Developing a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland, with a clear 'road map' for implementation.
- Implementing binding and stringent carbon emissions targets for the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government, codified in legislation with interim targets.
- Creating an independent Environmental Protection Agency. A more efficient and effective regulatory regime would lead to better environmental management and protection.
- Establishing a review of the enforcement of environmental regulations.
- Imposing a duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to reduce the carbon emissions from their own building stock and to produce 'green buildings' guidance for the public sector.
- Following up on the Marine Act with a cohesive Marine Plan with designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) based on scientific evidence, linking with other regions of the UK.
- Devising a robust cross-Departmental and public sector wide Sustainable Development Strategy.

Mitigating the Impacts of Climate Change

Sadly, the impacts of climate change are already upon us. We are experiencing changing and variable weather patterns, increases in flooding, changes in nature and the environment in these islands, and a financial cost to the Executive of addressing these and related problems. Governments must recognise these changes are occurring and be sure that we account for them.

Alliance will seek to:

- Establish robust evidence-gathering and reporting on the impact of climate change.
- Develop the 'polluter pays' principle further so that the burden of dealing with pollution is carried by those who are responsible for creating that pollution. A link between taxes on pollution and clean-up efforts will help reduce the initial environmental impact.
- Undertake complete audits of the existing Northern Ireland flooding infrastructure to establish what areas need priority investment, either through improving or constructing defences.
- Introduce legislation to create a framework for managing and reducing coastal erosion and flooding.

Waste

Reducing waste or improving recycling is an essential part of how we protect our environment. Despite improvements in recent years, overall levels of waste produced and rates of recycling remain considerably lower than European average levels. We are also concerned that there is significant variation in the recycling collection rates across Northern Ireland. We would decrease the amount of waste and improve recycling levels by:

- Introducing a legally-binding 60% target for recycling levels by 2020.
- Developing a Regional Waste Strategy to make sure that the skills and infrastructure are in place for councils to meet this target and to maximise the economic benefits of expanding this sector.
- Establishing a Waste Working Group to facilitate spreading best practice across all councils.
- Working with retailers and manufacturers on a Waste Minimisation Protocol to tackle excess packaging.

Nature, Wildlife and Biodiversity

Part of the environmental challenge that we face is restoring biodiversity and ensuring that nature is not affected by climate change. This is as much a part of our environmental responsibility as reducing climate change. Lower levels of biodiversity and higher levels of habitat destruction profoundly affect our ecosystem.

Alliance will promote the protection of wildlife and the promotion of biodiversity by:

- Protecting all existing EU environment directives by placing them into Northern Ireland's domestic law following the proposed withdrawal from the EU.
- Encouraging the development and funding of programmes to restore wildlife and biodiversity. Where appropriate this would include an all-island approach to wildlife management.
- Implement the EU Birds and Habitats Directive into domestic law following the proposed withdrawal from the EU.
- Preserving existing woodland and speeding up efforts to increase the amount of woodland. This will include better marketing of funding of existing funding to do this and assessing which publicly-owned land would be appropriate for woodland cover.
- Ensuring maximum opportunities to protect and restore our wetlands by ensuring conservation laws at least as strong as the Water Framework Directive. Ongoing investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure is also required.
- Implementing legislation to improve decision making around nature issues and to establish long-term targets and powers to meet them.
- Establishing a Land Use Strategy and shoreline plans.

- Introducing a Bee Strategy to address the drop-off in the number of bees, the consequence of which will be profound for the ecosystem.
- Introducing a National Parks Bill in Northern Ireland. This Bill would provide for the creation and designation of National Park status in Northern Ireland. The region is the only major part of Western Europe without a National Park. We will work toward the designation of at least one National Park in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that designation of a Mourne National Park could result in an additional £81 million per annum in tourism revenue and result in over 2,000 jobs in the park and its hinterland. The impact on the economy could be significant: research has shown that the three National Parks in Wales contribute £205 million to GDP.

Animal Welfare

Alliance has always prioritised animal welfare and sought to tackle cruelty against animals. People who show such barbarism are not only a danger to the animals involved, but potentially to our society as a whole.

Our priorities for animals in the agriculture sector include:

- Improving food labelling and traceability through proposals to label meat as either stunned or non-stunned, mandatory CCTV in slaughter-houses, and cracking-down on overuse of antibiotics in farming.
- Recognising the economic impact of Bovine TB on the farming community and the need for science- and evidence-based procedures to eradicate the disease. We oppose area-based badger culling as we do not believe it is proven to be effective or humane and has led to increases in Bovine TB outside the cull area. We would support research into the cause and transmission of Bovine TB and the effectiveness of 'trapping and testing' as well as more cost-effective versions of cattle vaccinations. We would especially work to remove barriers to cattle vaccination within the EU Single Market.
- Opposing the live export of animals.

Our priorities for legislation to improve animal welfare and reduce negligence include:

- Banning the use of wild animals in circuses.
- Introducing legislation similar to the Hunting Act 2004 in Northern Ireland.
- Increasing powers for local authorities to deal with issues around horse abandonment such as fly-grazing.
- Using the UK's global influence to end 'trophy hunting' and the trade of illegal animal products.
- Outlawing the use of snares.
- Introducing better regulation of the sale of puppies and kittens, especially when sold on the internet.
- Working to reduce and better regulate necessary animal testing and invest in developing alternative scientific methods and practices.

Our priorities for better regulation of animal ownership include:

- Micro-chipping and registration of cats on the same basis as for dogs.
- Improving information-sharing between animal welfare charities and statutory organisations in order to ensure that people who are banned from keeping domestic animals are prevented from doing so.
- Improving the enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act by deploying more animal welfare officers.

Agriculture and Fishing

Agriculture is a significant part of the Northern Ireland economy and plays a crucial role in both our economy and in countryside management. In rural areas local economies and identities can be strongly focussed on farming.

The proposed UK withdrawal from the European Union creates a period of deep uncertainty for Northern Ireland's farmers. It is not yet clear what will happen to agricultural support, nor whether farmers will have the same level of market access to sell their produce. In addition, we have received no guarantees that current EU powers over agriculture will be devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, nor that we will receive the current proportional share of UK agricultural funding that is spent in Northern Ireland. A 'perfect storm' of these factors could have a significantly damaging impact on Northern Ireland's farmers.

The collapse of the previous Executive means that many of these issues have been unaddressed.

Alliance believe that supporting our farmers is an imperative for the Executive. Regardless of the outcome of this scenario, we will push for the following values to be implemented in agricultural support:

- Securing membership of the EU's Single Market and Customs Union, ensuring our largest customers do not see price rises as a result of tariffs.
- Limiting the amount of agricultural support payments to the wealthiest farms so that farming support is prioritised for smaller farms rather than the largest producers. This must be based on farm size, not labour units. This will ensure that funding is spent in the fairest way possible, supporting smaller producers to develop. Savings made here would be used to support the agri-food industry to be innovative and modern.
- Paying agricultural support monies up front (like all other EU regions and member states) to ease farmers' cash flow.
- Ensuring that a small proportion of Northern Ireland's agricultural support funding is used for rural development projects and support schemes including: agri-food support; improving farm safety; tackling disease control; supporting innovation and research in rural businesses; and promoting sustainability.
- Directing a greater proportion of resources to farmers who operate environmentally sustainable farming methods and assisting farmers to develop micro-generation on their land.
- Continuing to use resources to discourage over-farming of areas, especially upland areas.
- Discouraging land abandonment.
- Targeting a proportion of rural development money at creating rural employment through renewing and maintaining our agricultural heritage of agricultural buildings, and bringing these up to standard as either tourist accommodation or for rural business use.

Alongside these proposed financial reforms, we will support agriculture by:

- Continuing to implement "Going for Growth" – the strategic action plan for agri-food. This will include developing partnerships between producers, retailers and government to maximise the potential of supply chains and working to reduce costs. This will include securing investment for the infrastructure needed to develop jobs in the supply chain.
- Making auditing support available to the various areas of farming such as cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, grain and arable farming. This will be the first step in ensuring that there are programmes of support for all sections of Northern Ireland's agricultural sector.
- Promoting innovation, particularly that which encourages grass-fed food production.
- Developing higher-level agricultural skills with a range of opportunities for people wishing to develop their skills in this area.

- Comprehensively reviewing the range of lending opportunities available to agricultural businesses and work with the banking sector to reduce the costs of accessing finance.
- Promoting Northern Ireland's food and drink to other parts of the world by identifying new export markets. This can be achieved by adequately marketing Northern Ireland produce.
- Continuing to support the Farm Safety Partnership.
- Ongoing commitment to the Balmoral show.
- Undertaking initial work to establish a Farming Centre of Excellence for Northern Ireland in order to pursue collaboration and promote the strength of our sector.

As with agriculture, fishing is a major industry in many communities. It also faces a series of changes as a result of the proposed withdrawal from the EU. We will re-invigorate the industry to:

- Supporting the fishing industry in moving to more sustainable methods of catching fish.
- Developing a method of deciding fish quotas which is flexible and efficient.
- Incorporating long-term, regional stock management plans to ensure that fish stocks remain at sustainable levels.
- Ensuring the ban on 'discards,' which results in dead fish being put back into the sea, remains in place.
- Providing investment in fishing skills so that fishing communities can continue to have a renewal of labour.
- Auditing fishing infrastructure across Northern Ireland to identify where investment could be targeted.
- Developing an Inland Fisheries Strategy to ensure that fish stocks are sustainable and that watercourses are clean.
- Supporting the introduction of a Fisheries Bill to modernise the current arrangements for the fishing industry.

Both the agriculture and fishing industries face challenges relating to falling prices paid for their produce. The most obvious and recent example of this has been the milk 'gate price' falling below the cost of production: this is not a unique situation. Such problems are not related to a single sector. To tackle this we will:

- Assist farmers and fishermen to work co-operatively to market produce together in order to get the best market price.
- Make the supermarket ombudsman a more pro-active role to include enforcement of large fines to tackle poor prices for all farmers; in many cases the prices paid are below costs of production.
- Push for an enhancement to the UK's Groceries Code Adjudicator to strengthen the role.

Rural Communities

Rural communities are under threat: many farms fail to provide an income for farm families; there can be limited job opportunities; and often, rural communities have poor access to services that support the most vulnerable in society. We must: put in place structures that support vibrant and dynamic rural communities; open up employment opportunities in tourism, niche trade and renewables; and create access to essential services through innovative and collaborative service delivery. We will:

- Ensure “Going for Growth” – the strategic action plan for agri-food – is delivered to create jobs in rural communities.
- Support the development of energy efficiency and renewable energy production within the funding of the Rural Development Programme.
- Promote collaborative delivery of services to ensure that public services are available in rural areas. This would include integrating community transport and more traditional public transport options.
- Invest in greater coverage for broadband and mobile telephone coverage.
- Acknowledge the differing patterns of division in rural areas and ensure this is addressed in the Rural Development Plan.



Finance

Robust public finances underpin the provision of services and economic growth. Bankrupt government cannot provide welfare or public services. As a result, we must recognise the financial and legal context in which our Executive must operate. Continuous deadlocks over financial issues undermine the provision of public services.

Across the world, there have been numerous examples of governments, whether national, regional or local, which have had to deal with substantial financial deficits. Northern Ireland is not unique in this regard. However, the divided nature of our society and our low levels of taxation exacerbate the problems that we do face.

The public finances in Northern Ireland have needed significant reform for decades and financial difficulties predate the most recent crisis. Continual financial crises are undermining public services and preventing the Northern Ireland Executive from improving the economy.

The creation of a stable budget is essential for Northern Ireland's progress.

Unlike others, Alliance has always acted responsibly with regards to the public finances. We have made tough decisions and have not resorted to delay or quick fixes. However, much hard work needs to be done to stabilise Northern Ireland's finances.

The 2017/18 budget

The timing of this election comes at a particularly bad time in the cycle of government decision-making.

Even beyond the wider failures of this Executive, the DUP and Sinn Féin have not agreed a Programme for Government, an Economic Strategy, a Social Strategy, and Investment Strategy, and a Budget for the 2017/18 Financial Year.

Beyond the missed opportunity for a more strategic use of resources in the context of tightening public expenditure, in this particular situation there is a question regarding the scope for basic budget decisions to be taken, and real risk to the quality of public services and the capacity to see a transformation in the economy.

In particular, the current approach to the health service is not financially sustainable, and the need for both additional funding and reform is very urgent, and in the absence of change, it is likely will be significant impact on patients and further deterioration in health outcomes.

There is a considerable risk of substantial damage being caused to Northern Ireland from this situation.

The emergency stop-gap budget-setting measures set out in the Northern Ireland Act (1998) are untested and seem inadequate. These interim decisions come too late and won't allow for effective planning, thereby compromising the effective deployment of scarce resources, may postpone any decisions on discretionary spending, with a particular impact on the community and voluntary sector in which many staff have already been placed on protective notice.

Setting a budget is the most important act that any government takes. As a result, Alliance will argue for an emergency budget to be agreed within the first week of the next Executive taking office.

In parallel, Alliance will advocate that the Secretary of State puts emergency legislation through Westminster to reform the Northern Ireland Act to provide more scope and flexibility in terms of the default mechanisms for budget setting in order to minimise the damage to the economy and society from political deadlock.

The Cost of Division

Major distortions remain within the provision of public services within the context of a divided society. This is not just a legacy issue but this pattern of duplication in service delivery continues to be replicated.

Alliance has long advocated that the Executive tackle division and sectarianism in Northern Ireland. This is not just because of our strong support for promoting integration and a shared future, but because we know that a divided society costs more to run.

Tackling the cost of division is by far the most significant long-term financial challenge facing the Northern Ireland Executive.

The costs of a divided society are apparent in four respects. Firstly, there are the direct costs of policing riots, other civil disturbances and parades, the distortions to policing that arise from the security threat, and the costs to a wide range of agencies in repairing damaged buildings and facilities.

Secondly, there are the indirect costs of providing duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community, either implicitly or explicitly. This includes: schools, GP surgeries, job centres, community centres, leisure centres, and even bus stops. These costs are borne not just by the public sector, but by the private sector too.

Thirdly, related to the second aspect, there are hidden costs. These are linked to divisions, which impact upon the cost environment that Departments and agencies have to respond to. Examples include significant pressures on the housing sector from demographic imbalances and senses of territoriality as well as the environmental impacts of inefficient mobility. Fourthly, there are the opportunity costs of lost inward investment and tourism. While the Northern Ireland economy has performed better in recent years, it is still performing well below its potential capacity.

It is essential that the Executive and Assembly acknowledge the financial and other cost implications of divisions in Northern Ireland, and commit to addressing them. The savings will be redirected into reforming public services and rebalancing the local economy.

Alliance will therefore press for the Executive to take the following actions to assess the current problem:

- Requiring all Departments to conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessment of the impact of societal division and develop a plan to reduce it.
- Acknowledging the financial and other cost implications of division in Northern Ireland, and commit to presenting a practical and costed plan to tackle these issues immediately and embed these plans in the next Programme for Government and budget.
- Requiring all Departments to actively encourage de-segregation and to promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.
- Producing legislation to ensure that Departments are required to consider and promote integration when developing policy in the future.

We believe that a time of difficult fiscal challenge it is unreasonable to present a programme for savings and revenue if the resources generated by doing so are wasted on maintaining a divided system. Many of the proposals throughout our manifesto will benefit public finances.

These include: promoting shared education, investing in good relations and increasing the amount of shared space in Northern Ireland.

A Strategic Approach to Funding

We are deeply concerned that the overall spending for each department has not undergone a serious review in the lifetime in this Assembly. The allocation of funding needs to be on the basis of need rather than political expediency. Alliance will:

- Fundamentally re-assess the need of each service and money allocated to the departments on that basis.
- Provide a formal assessment at each monitoring round of the relative importance of what have been termed as ‘inescapable pressures’ versus the impact of the cuts elsewhere to meet them.
- Ensure sufficient funding for the Health Service, but ensure greater transparency over what is being protected.
- Develop a benchmarking process to assist in assessing need by identifying areas where there is underspending compared to other, similar regions.

Investing in Prevention

A shift in the balance of resources into programmes that seek to prevent problems from emerging or to seek to intervene at an early stage can produce savings through avoiding the need to spend greater levels of resources after problems fully develop.

However, the funding of the former tends to be optional while the funding of the latter tends to be statutory. There is a case for shifting the balance of funding, and this means also following through with projected savings with back-end funding. This is not ‘a leap of faith’ as there is already considerable empirical evidence from other jurisdictions of this approach being successful. A focus on preventative measures can ensure savings across a range of public spending areas including health, justice and social care.

Public Sector Reform

The passage of the Local Government Act, which reduced the number of councils and conferred additional powers upon them, demonstrates that significant public sector reform can take place in Northern Ireland if the political will exists.

We note that there are a number of areas where political reform could be undertaken where services can be improved at the same time that budgets can be cut. To do this, we will:

- Promote and encourage the delivery of services on a North-South basis, underpinned by a work programme agreed between the Executive and the Irish Government. Areas we consider to be particularly primed for cross-border action include: all-island marketing, e.g. tourism, green economy; investing in infrastructure, such as energy, transport, telecommunications; culture; environmental protection; and addressing barriers to labour market mobility.
- ‘Market-test’ the cost and quality of services where appropriate to ensure that they are delivering value for money. Greater competition can often improve cost effectiveness whilst improving or maintaining quality and generate savings of between 10% and 30%. We are not advocating that services should be outsourced, but rather all services should be examined to ensure that they are being delivered in the most cost effective manner. Partnership with the voluntary, community and the private sector is required.
- Generate savings through divestment from public assets when public sector reforms reduce the number of buildings or land required by the Executive. This will generate capital receipts for investment elsewhere. Some of the receipts should be earmarked for investing in energy efficiency across the public sector to lower energy costs in the long run.
- Create a public register of publicly-owned land and property in order to assist planning and divestment.

Raising Additional Revenue

Fiscal contractions are best dealt with by a ratio of spending cuts and revenue rises. Both the UK and Irish governments dealt with their recent deficit reduction programmes by using such a combination of measures.

Our view is that additional revenue could be raised from those who can most afford it and that it should be spent on public services and job creation. These are services which disproportionately benefit vulnerable people. As a result, fair revenue-raising that funds public services ensures that the impact of spending cuts is spread fairly.

It is not credible to argue for revenue-raising without achieving some of the efficiency reforms that we are advocating elsewhere in this document. This is not a stand-alone proposal but part of a coherent package of reforms. It is important that people are not being asked to paper over the cracks in public finances through revenue-raising in the absence of other reforms.

We believe that the following options could generate additional finance for the Executive:

- Encouraging the UK Government to introduce a Tax-Dodging Bill to require foreign companies to pay tax on those profits generated from within the UK, review current tax relief schemes to ensure they are not-being exploited, reform rules which allow companies to avoid tax in both the UK and in developing countries, and improve transparency around company reports and beneficial interests of companies.
- Within the more difficult context that will follow UK withdrawal from the EU, seeking to maximise our work with European institutions in regards to funding.
- Supporting a moderate rise in the regional rate.
- Removing the cap on the rates that stops the owners of the wealthiest properties from paying the same percentage rate as everyone else. We will establish a deferred payment scheme for these properties if necessary and ensure appropriate protections for those on fixed or lower incomes.
- Revaluing properties on a more regular basis, in order to ensure that their rateable value reflects economic trends.
- Assessing whether particular subsidies (or de facto subsidies) could be abolished in order to invest in public services.
- Reviewing the cost of government-owned leases for 'Grade A' office space, given concerns that they are lower than elsewhere in the UK and consequently disrupting the market.
- Pushing for the devolution of borrowing powers on the same basis as the Scottish Parliament to enable capital investment.

Benchmarking and Market-testing

Decisions on public expenditure in Northern Ireland can be informed by the nature of decisions taken in other, particularly neighbouring, jurisdictions, as well as benchmarking delivery internally (for example at a local authority level). While there are particular circumstances to the local expenditure environment and organisational differences, considerable lessons can nevertheless be drawn from other experiences.

This can extend to both the balance of spending between and within Departments or spending areas. The use of the annual Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses from HM Treasury is informative at a high level. Often significant savings can be made through modernisation and implementation of best practice. There will be areas in which spending in Northern Ireland is greater on a per capita basis than in other jurisdictions, even taking into account increased need, and other areas where spending is much less.

The key question is whether or not these distortions can be justified in light of Northern Ireland's particular circumstances or whether they point to underlying inefficiencies.

Evidence to date from Departments is that benchmarking is at best patchy, piecemeal and small scale.

However, some important action is being conducted in this regard. Initial work in this area completed by the Department of Justice has resulted in savings in the Northern Ireland legal aid bill of £30 million per annum while still protecting the most vulnerable in society.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure can be viewed as the connections and utilities that enable us to live our lives and, as such, facilitates economic growth. But there has been consistent underinvestment for this area and this contributes to restraining Northern Ireland's growth. There needs to be radical improvement in infrastructure to prepare Northern Ireland for the future.

The new Department for Infrastructure will give Northern Ireland the chance to modernise its infrastructure. There will be significant economic and social benefits in doing so. However, this will take concerted political partnership and a responsible approach to planning. Alliance is fully committed to taking those responsible decisions.

A Consistent Approach to Infrastructure

We will create a new approach within which decisions relating to infrastructure are made. The new Department for Infrastructure will take a lead on deciding which projects are the most important. This new approach will consist of:

- A Regional Infrastructure Panel to identify the most important long-term infrastructure needs of Northern Ireland and to examine the costs associated with them. This will ensure essential information is included in the debate about infrastructure.
- A Single Infrastructure Plan, produced by the Executive following advice from the Panel, based on strategic need.
- Consistent attempts to increase the amount of funding for infrastructure by using the Single Infrastructure Plan to make the case for additional funding, including seeking to retain membership of the EU Investment Bank after Brexit.
- Maintenance of a list of 'shovel-ready' projects that can be invested in if infrastructure funding becomes available at short notice, such as through delays to other projects.
- Establishment of a central procurement division with responsibility for all capital projects.

Water and Sewerage

The provision of safe and clean water is an essential priority for Government. This needs to be provided in a way that ensures investment in our water infrastructure while protecting the environment. Sadly, the current arrangements do not allow for this.

The current subsidy paid to NI Water is over £200 million every year. Therefore, the subsidy for water results in money being redirected from public services or investment in our economy to cover this.

Avoiding water charges means deeper cuts in those public services. In essence, people are already paying for water through an under-funded health service.

Furthermore, the current governance model for NI water combined with the absence of a sufficient level of independent income distinct from the direct subsidy, restricts the ability of NI Water to borrow money for investment in infrastructure from commercial sources.

Alliance believes that the introduction of separate, but not additional, water charges, which must be linked to use, is consistent with a progressive approach to revenue-raising and ensuring services are provided to the most vulnerable in society. By contrast, continued prevarication over this issue is regressive in its effects by hitting the services that provide for the most vulnerable in our society.

Payment must be supported by an efficient and timely service. We will ensure this by:

- Developing a comprehensive Water Plan which will invest in infrastructure, tackle pollution and develop conservation measures.
- Establishing NI Water as a government-owned or mutual company.
- Ensuring that any water charging regime includes mitigations for those on the lower incomes.
- Installing water meters to ensure that sustainability is promoted.
- Ensuring that sewerage infrastructure planning takes account of the high proportions of septic tanks in rural areas.

Any proposals for water charging must be consistent with the principals around revenue-rating that we have set out in the Finance section of this manifesto.

Therefore, for Alliance, any water charge would displace an equivalent amount of income raised from the regional rate. However, this switch, combined with a change in governance, would have the potential to generate significant additional sums for investment in a crumbling water and sewerage infrastructure without any additional net cost to individual households.

Investing in Sustainable Transport

Transport is an essential part of our infrastructure. It helps businesses to trade and residents to go about their lives. That is why we want to see an infrastructure that best enables these journeys. However, this needs to be balanced with a more sustainable transport network and investment in sustainable forms of transport.

Investment in public and sustainable transport must be at the heart of our transport priorities. It contributes to our environmental targets and reduces congestion. Alliance is committed to investing in public transport and reforming our infrastructure. Our priorities for this are:

- Gradually channelling public investment towards transport. This will include rebalancing the way Departmental money is allocated but also seeking out new sources of financing, such as the Green Investment Bank.
- Instituting new rules on integrated transport and ensure access to sustainable transport is considered in major planning decisions.
- Advocating for the installation of both audio and visual announcements across all forms of public transport.
- Integration between public transport systems to create links between the bus and rail network, private car users and our airports and ports. Examples include enhanced park and ride facilities at bus and rail stations.
- Continuing to support the development of community transport, working with providers to increase coverage.
- Working with councils to ensure that access to public transport is included in community planning.
- Extend the SmartPass scheme for people who are unable to drive for medical reasons so that they receive the entire fare as a concession.

Alliance is also a vocal advocate of promoting cycling and walking. We believe that there are significant environmental and health benefits to enabling people to undertake short journeys by foot or by bike. The main problem with this is safety and, therefore, the need to rebalance the amount of cycling provision we have on our roads. In order to facilitate this, we will:

- Develop an Active Travel Bill to promote cycling and walking.
- Fully implement the 25-year Cycling Strategy, with appropriate investment.

- Adopt sustainable travel plans to make it easier for cyclists and walkers to get about town. We will especially promote safe cycle routes with bicycle storage and suitable pavements with road crossings to encourage walking.
- Create a cycling and walking ‘greenway’ network across Northern Ireland.
- Work with schools to promote active travel to and from school.

Improving Air Connectivity

Air transport in Northern Ireland faces unique challenges due to our geography and the range of flights available. In order to compete with other regions of Europe, air connectivity must be improved. Otherwise, business users and leisure travellers will face additional costs or fewer services.

Alliance will:

- Support the reduction or abolition of Air Passenger Duty across the UK. This tax disproportionately affects Northern Ireland due to the need for reliance on air transport to reach UK cities.
- Advocate for early development of airport capacity in the south-east of England. We acknowledge the need for an international airport ‘hub’ in the UK and for any expansion to take account of the specific needs of business exports, such as cargo capacity and connectivity.
- Work with governments, airports and airlines to increase the range of both direct flights and connections available to passengers from Northern Ireland.
- Invest in better public transport links from our local airports.

Road Safety

Alliance is deeply concerned about the number of deaths on our roads and believes that improvements in transport infrastructure must be accompanied by improvements to road safety. The public need to be responsible when using the roads and this must also be re-enforced by the Executive. We will achieve this by:

- Allowing councils to introduce 20mph speed limits in residential and other appropriate areas.
- Increasing the availability of footpaths in rural areas.
- Replacing the current restrictions on new drivers with a requirement to re-take a driving test if drivers make driving errors. This will be more targeted than the current system.
- Auditing whether the current style of road safety adverts is effective or if alternative, more constructive styles would work better.

Planning

The devolution of planning powers to local councils has significantly overhauled the way that planning powers are exercised. We supported these reforms as they will ensure that these decisions are locally accountable. However, planning decisions must also be transparent. We will continue to push for these decisions to be made in an open manner – with councillors making their decisions based on evidence not politics.

We want to ensure that the early years of this new planning regime operate smoothly and efficiently. We will establish a review after three years to ensure that it is working optimally.

We will also reform the planning system by:

- Introducing a limited and qualified third-party right of appeal in planning decisions so that local communities will have the same right to object to planning decisions as developers.
- Delivering greater protection for historical buildings and green spaces.
- Allowing local councils to introduce caps on Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in tightly-defined areas.
- Examining how those developments that have clear economic benefits should receive accelerated passage through the planning system. This is not about rebalancing the planning system in favour of development, but rather expediting critical decisions. It is important that investors have certainty and are not left to wait for prolonged periods while decisions are made.



International Affairs

The Northern Ireland political institutions have considerable opportunities to engage at a European and international level, to avail of opportunities offered to this region, and to help other states and regions in return.

Increasingly, regions have become actors in their own right, either in conjunction with or independent of their national governments, on the international stage. Our relationships at an international and European level are critical for our future success. We must thrive at developing competitive international networks.

Northern Ireland can also play a role in promoting international development. In particular, as the peace process is regarded internationally as a significant success story, there remain ongoing opportunities and obligations to share such experiences. Furthermore, as a result of such success, Northern Ireland retains considerable political capital and goodwill within and across the international community.

Northern Ireland's Global Links

Northern Ireland's links must stretch beyond the boundaries of the European Union. There are economic, cultural and environmental benefits to international interaction. Whilst the First Minister and deputy First Minister will remain responsible for the international profile of Northern Ireland, every Executive Minister is able to play a role in this. Alliance will:

- Ensure that there is a cross-Department approach to European and international engagement.
- Commitment to the sharing of best practice from our peace and political process within Europe and further afield.
- Support, encourage and facilitate educational and cultural exchanges between Northern Ireland and developing countries.
- Support investment in international development and in fair trade initiatives.

Supporting Human Rights and Political Freedoms

Alliance is a party which respects and promotes human rights, civil liberties and political freedom. We believe that these issues are universal and must be respected by governments across the world. We will always seek to promote our values abroad, promoting a world which is tolerant, respects human rights and supports political freedom. Alliance will:

- Continue to promote our unwavering commitment to freedom of, and from, religion across the world and oppose discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.
- Recognise that civil liberties and the rule of law are a crucial part of developing stable governments and enabling economic growth and will ensure this recognition is embedded in foreign affairs.
- Pay particular attention to protecting the rights and well-being of women across the world, given that women are usually financially and politically worse off than men. Access to education is a priority.
- Promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights across the world.
- Use the UK's role in the Commonwealth nations to make progress on protecting the rights of women, religious minorities and LGBT people.
- Strengthen the role the EU plays in overseeing elections abroad, so that we can continue to promote fair and free elections.

- Promote Northern Ireland's experience in replacing conflict with democracy to those regions of the world where this might be applied. Most notably this would include Israel-Palestine where we support a negotiated two-state solution.
- Continue to support the fight against slave labour, human trafficking and advocate the end of UK support for arms sales to countries engaged in these activities.

Our Legislative Priorities

1 **Single Equality Bill**

This Bill will harmonise existing equality and anti-discrimination measures and update and strengthen equality provisions. Our Act would also revise Fair Employment monitoring to better reflect the diversity of mixed and multiple identities within Northern Ireland.

2 **Marriage (Same-sex couples) Bill**

This Bill will extend civil marriage provisions to same sex couples, provided that robust protections are provided through legislation to protect faith groups and religious celebrants who do not wish to marry same-sex couples.

3 **Integrated Education Bill**

This Bill will provide a greater basis for the further development of integrated education and will implement those parts of our nine-point plan for integrated education.

4 **Climate Change Bill**

This Bill will develop a climate change framework for Northern Ireland, with a clear 'road map' for implementation. This would include binding and stringent carbon emissions targets for the Northern Ireland Executive.

5 **Environmental Protection Bill**

This Bill will update environmental regulation and enforcement, including the establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency.

6 **Animal Welfare Bill**

This Bill will include provisions that prohibit wild animals in circuses, the hunting of animals with dogs, the use of electronic dog collars and the use of snares. It will also better regulate the sale of puppies and kittens.

7 **Access to Justice Bill**

This Bill will deliver reforms flowing from the Access to Justice Review (Pt II) and the judicially-led Review of Civil and Family Justice, as well as new compensation arrangements.

8 **Sentencing Bill**

This Bill will implement reforms flowing from the planned review of the penal policy, and the replacement of current custodial orders and community disposals in youth justice cases.

9 **Adoption Bill**

This Bill will provide a long overdue update of Adoption Law in Northern Ireland by ensuring uniformity across statutory agencies, setting clear standards in terms of quality and putting in place eligibility criteria that reflect the norms of modern society.

10 **Private Renting and Apartments Bill**

This Bill will improve the regulation of the private rented sector, focusing on increasing security of tenure, improving standards in poorer homes and reducing up-front fees. It will also address current inadequacies in the laws governing aspects of the ownership of certain types of private properties which comprise part of multi-unit developments and the management of any designated common areas.

11 **Flying of Flags on Street Furniture**

This Bill will introduce a regulatory system for the flying of flags on lampposts.

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