

**FORWARD.
FASTER.**

Manifesto 2016

An agenda to increase the
speed of change in Northern Ireland

5 quick steps to move Northern Ireland forward. Faster.



**Build an
integrated
society**



**Fund
services,
not division**



**Clean
up
politics**



**Invest in
jobs, skills &
the economy**



**End all
forms of
paramilitarism**

Alliance
FASTFORWARD»

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Introduction by David Ford

Northern Ireland is a better place now than it was when the ceasefires were declared in 1994 and even when the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998. There has been progress towards a peaceful, shared and fair society.

But this progress has not been fast enough. Opportunities have been missed. Crucial issues have been ignored.

Far too often, progress has been held up by bickering and political gridlock. Northern Ireland is missing out on opportunities for investment in our economy and public services.

Alliance doesn't believe that this is good enough. Eighteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, we should be so much further ahead than we are.

Since the last election, Alliance Ministers have worked hard, delivering on their promises and demonstrating meaningful reform.

As Minister of Justice, I can genuinely say that there has been more fundamental reform to the Justice system in those six years than in the previous sixteen – or possibly twenty six. All has been around the concept of building a safer community, and a shared community.

Meanwhile, as Minister for Employment and Learning, Stephen Farry has delivered a new strategy to radically transform apprenticeship opportunities, assisted thousands of people to find sustainable employment, and delivered new investments to build our base in science and the knowledge economy – to name but a few of his achievements.

This record shows that with the right political leadership, progress is possible.

While other politicians talk in sound bites, we are proud that our ideas can be backed up by substantive, realistic proposals.

That progress now needs to be delivered on a much bigger scale.



Our manifesto lays out our plans for the kind of progress that can be achieved with the right leadership. The following five steps set out our plans for a shared, prosperous Northern Ireland.

Build an integrated society

- We will develop a comprehensive approach to promoting a shared future, through prioritising integrated education, shared neighbourhoods and promoting community relations.
- We will deliver progress on a wide-range of outstanding equality matters, such as a Single Equality Act.

Fund services, not division

- We will require every Minister to tackle division so money is re-invested in front-line services such as health, our skills base, and opportunities for the most vulnerable.
- We will implement a programme of reform and plan for the future of the health service based on clinical evidence.

Clean up politics

- We will let the public know who donates money to Northern Ireland's political parties.
- We will reform the Assembly so that there is a more normal government-and-opposition political system and sectarian designations in the Assembly are removed.

Invest in jobs, skills and the economy

- We will create a robust inter-departmental economic strategy which focuses on job creation and growth.
- We will invest at least an additional £85 million each year in skills.

End all forms of paramilitarism

- We will pursue Executive-wide commitment to tackling all paramilitary and organised crime groups.
- We will set a target that by 2025 all threat, intimidation and exclusive claims to territorial monopoly will be eliminated.

These steps are built on our one key objective: it is time we stopped the delay, the fudge, and the waffle of other parties and moved ahead, further and faster, to build a United Community. No other party puts that first. No other party has that commitment. No other party can be trusted to deliver on that essential change.

Northern Ireland needs to move forward.
With Alliance, we can move Forward. Faster. Together.



David Ford Alliance Party Leader



Executive Summary

Our manifesto includes a comprehensive set of proposals to move Northern Ireland forward, faster. This summary highlights our key commitments to increase the speed of change.

Fast Forward >> Shared Future and Equality

Creating a shared future has not happened quickly enough, with the DUP and Sinn Fein 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.**

OFMDFM, run by the DUP and Sinn Fein, 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.**

Despite significant popular support and a recent majority in the NI Assembly, equal marriage is still blocked from becoming law here. **We would introduce legislation to extend civil marriage provisions to same sex couples, with protections for faith groups who don't want to marry same sex couples.**

Fast Forward >> Political Reform

The Assembly's structures often allow all political parties to create gridlock and hold up important decisions. **We will reform the Assembly so that there is a more normal government-and-opposition political system and sectarian designation in the Assembly are removed.**

Eighteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, there is still not enough being done to ensure that the Executive promotes integration. **We will introduce "shared-future proofing" to ensure that all public investment supports and underpins an open, peaceful and united society.**

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.**

Fast Forward >> Justice

Under an Alliance Minister of Justice, crime rates are lower and community safety has been increased. We have invested in reducing crime and re-offending, enhancing community safety and supporting victims of crime.

Twenty-two years after the ceasefires and 18 years after the Good Friday Agreement, all illegal organisations should have long ceased to exist. **We will pursue Executive-wide commitment to tackling all paramilitary and organised crime groups.**

Despite initial agreement on institutions to deal with the past, the DUP and Sinn Fein left this out of their so-called 'Fresh Start' deal. **We will seek to establish the full range of institutions and services that are needed.**

We have made progress on reforming the prison system so that it reduces re-offending by promoting rehabilitation. **We will continue to do this, placing particular emphasis on Youth Justice.**

Fast Forward >> Economy and Skills

Under an Alliance Minister for Employment and Learning, we have seen a significant drop in unemployment from almost 60,000 in May 2011 to well under 40,000 today. We have also invested in skills through new strategies on apprenticeships and youth training, plus more STEM places and PhDs.

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.**

The recession has been hard on many local shopping and business districts and many streets in Northern Ireland now have a high number of vacant and closed up shops. **We will produce a strategy to support town centres and high streets and the businesses that are based there.**

Fast Forward >> Education

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.**

Whilst there is more and more evidence that not all children are meeting their potential in school, we are yet to see significant change in support for those children. **We will invest in programmes to tackle poor levels of literacy and numeracy, starting with those schools with the highest need.**

The DUP and Sinn Féin 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.**

Fast Forward >> Health and Social Services

Our health and social services are going through the greatest period of change and challenge for many years, but the current approach to health and social services is not sustainable and not enough is being done to change it. **We will implement a programme of reform, based on clinical evidence, and plan for the future of the health service and further investments in access for patients.**

Mental health services are underfunded in comparison to other services and compared to UK mental health services. **We would place mental health at the core of the health service with our comprehensive plan to investment in and remove the stigma from mental health services.**

We have an inadequate system of social care for our senior citizens and also those with long-term conditions. **We will encourage as many people as possible to remain in their homes and in their community.**

Fast Forward >> Communities, Arts and Sport

Over 90% of public housing in Northern Ireland is still segregated, even though all spaces should be open to everyone. **We will set a target that all evidence of threat, intimidation and exclusive claims to territorial monopoly will be eliminated in Northern Ireland.**

The new local councils are supposed to be in charge of regenerating their local areas, but political disagreement between the DUP and Sinn Féin mean these powers have not been passed on to councils. **We will devolve these powers to local councils.**

Culture and the arts have been consistently underfunded in Northern Ireland even though they have been proven to promote reconciliation, improve quality of life and support the economy. **We will raise arts spending to at least the average spend on arts in these islands per capita.**

Fast Forward >> Environment and Agriculture

Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom without its own legislation on climate change, even though the Executive has a wide range of powers to reduce carbon emissions. **We will develop a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland with a clear 'road map' for implementation.**

Northern Ireland does not have an independent Environmental Protection Agency even though a more efficient and effective regulatory regime would lead to better environmental management and protection. **We will create an independent Environmental Protection Agency.**

Agriculture and food is an essential part of the Northern Ireland economy but we are in danger of letting this important industry down. **We will work with producers, retailers and government to best implement "Going for Growth" – the strategic action plan for agri-food.**

Fast Forward >> Finance

Despite a recent report that said division costs Northern Ireland hundreds of millions each year, there is no central plan to reduce this. **We will require every Minister to tackle division so we can reinvest this money in front-line services such as health, our skills base, and opportunities for the most vulnerable.**

Northern Ireland's budget is often devised to be politically expedient rather than what is best for public services. **We will draw up any budget in a strategic way that is based on departmental need.**

Fast Forward >> Infrastructure

Too often our infrastructure is held back by poor decision-making and under-investment. **We will create a Regional Infrastructure Panel to identify the most important long-term infrastructure projects and to examine the costs associated with them.**

Public transport is essential to a modern and effective transport system but it often finds itself underfunded. **We will channel public investment towards public transport and seek out new sources of financing.**

Alliance supports Northern Ireland remaining in the EU



Demonstrating Delivery

Department for Employment and Learning

Over the past five years, through holding office within the Department for Employment and Learning, Alliance has delivered a broad set of reforms and improvements to further develop skills and labour market participation.

The skill levels of individuals and the profile of skills across Northern Ireland has improved, with a greater volume of high level skills including in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

There has been a significant drop in claimant-count unemployment from a peak level of almost 60,000 in May 2011 to well under 40,000 today. This includes a reduction over 23 consecutive months, the longest continuous fall for over 20 years.

Key Achievements

- Delivered a new strategy to radically transform the apprenticeship system.
- Frozen tuition fees for local students attending NI universities.
- New student support package for part-time undergraduate and master's studies.
- Delivered over 1,400 additional university places in Science and Technology.
- Doubling the number of state-funded PhD places over this decade.
- 5,000 jobs created through Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) Assured Skills Programme.
- New investments to strengthen NI Research Base and its links to employers.
- 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 Community Family Support Programme.
- Radically improved careers provision.

Skills Development

Under an Alliance Minister, significant progress has been made towards meeting the 2020 skill targets in the Northern Ireland Skill Strategy, 'Success through Skills: Transforming Futures'.

Alliance has provided a stronger focus around STEM Skills across all skills interventions. A particular focal point has been encouraging greater female participation in STEM.

An innovative, cutting-edge Skills Barometer has been developed through Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre to estimate the future skills needs in Northern Ireland across a range of economic scenarios up to 2025. This provides detailed information on skill requirements by sector and by qualification level. This tool supports individuals to make career choices.

Research has also been conducted to assess Northern Ireland's skills requirements in the context of a lower rate of corporation tax. The results highlighted the importance of investment in STEM, and Management and Leadership Skills.

Alliance has been instrumental in developing a revised Careers Strategy for Northern Ireland. This strategy builds upon an inquiry conducted by the Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning at the instigation of Alliance MLA Chris Lyttle. This Careers Strategy places a stronger focus on working with employers, other stakeholders, e-delivery, accurate labour market information, work experience, accessing impartial advice and quality provision.

In support of STEM, Alliance has been the main supporter of the first Northern Ireland Science Festival. We also supported the NCAA Friendship Four Ice Hockey tournament.

New Systems of Apprenticeships and Youth Training

Alliance has introduced a radical, new, complementary system for Apprenticeships and Youth Training.

The new system for apprenticeships will be open to any occupational area requiring professional or technical training. Already we have seen hundreds of new apprenticeship opportunities being offered by employers. It will apply from level three up to level eight (doctorate) and include Higher Level Apprenticeships. A strategic advisory forum, based on a partnership comprising of employers, government, trade unions and providers of off-the-job training, has been established to advise government on the provision of apprenticeships. A range of sectoral partnerships are being established to ensure that apprenticeships meet the needs of employers both now and into the future.

There will be a single award/qualification for apprenticeship occupations at each level. Government is also establishing a central service to support, market and promote apprenticeships for both employers and participants, which will include an online portal for the advertising and application of apprenticeship opportunities.

At level two, the new system of youth training, which is open to all young people between 16 and 24 whether in-work or out-of-work, will have a dual purpose. It will provide young people with a solid foundation of skills, experience and qualifications that are recognised by employers and relevant to opportunities in today's labour market and will also provide them with broad-based knowledge and skills, including essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, as the basis from which they can access future opportunities for employment or further study. It will share many of the support mechanisms with the apprenticeship strategy. This approach will better help to address educational under-achievement, facilitate the entry of young people into the labour market and provide a foundation for their onward progression.

Further Education Transformed

Alliance has placed further education (FE) at the centre of the skills infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Colleges play an important economic and social role. This enhanced role stands in contrast to the relative neglect of FE in other parts of these islands. A new Employer Support Programme with respective skills and research strands entitled, Skills Focus and Innovate Us, has been introduced. Notably, FE Colleges have been given the lead role in terms of the skills advisory landscape.

A new Further Education Strategy, 'Further Education Means Success', encapsulating the evolution of the economic role of colleges in working with employers on skills and research needs and their delivery of the new systems of apprenticeships and youth training, was published in January 2016.

Capital investments include the opening of the new Titanic and E3 Campuses for Belfast Met, the Strand Road campus for NWRC, the new SERC building in Downpatrick, and the SPACE facility at SERC in Bangor. Capital projects have been initiated for Armagh, Ballymena, Banbridge, Craigavon, Coleraine and Enniskillen.

Higher Education

Alliance has consolidated the critical role of higher education as a provider of skills and research, and further facilitated their wider contribution to the economy and wider society.

Alliance has delivered Northern Ireland's first Higher Education Strategy, 'Graduating to Success', which rebalances what universities and other higher education institutions offer students and emphasises the importance of employability skills.

Tuition fees have been frozen in real terms for local students attending local universities.

The Alliance Minister has introduced new, non means tested, 'top-up' tuition fee loans for part-time students. At the moment part-time students can access grant funding to support them with their tuition fees, but it is often not enough to cover the full cost of their tuition and it is also means tested. In reality, most part-time students are ineligible to receive any support and the vast majority must self-fund their studies.

Students from lower incomes will continue to be able to access the existing grants, but they will also be able to top them up with a loan for their tuition fees should they need to, providing them with the same level of tuition fee support over the lifetime of their course as their full-time counterparts. Students ineligible to receive the existing fee grants will also be able to access these new loans.

This combination of grants and loans for part-time tuition fee support is unique within the UK. It will vastly improve access to financial support for part-time students and ensure closer parity with their full-time counterparts. This improved support package is not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative as we contend with increasing skills demands and the need to up-skill and re-skill our existing workforce.

There are currently about 20,000 students in universities and colleges who could potentially access the new 'top-up' loans. The new 'top-up' loans will be available from 2017/18 academic year.

Alliance has also introduced new funding support for students studying for taught Masters Programmes. Currently the majority of our postgraduate students cannot access any standard student support package for their tuition fees. The vast majority, particularly those on taught courses such as Masters Programmes, must self-fund their studies. A new non-means tested tuition fee loan of up to £5,500 for taught postgraduate students from Northern Ireland will be available. An expansion of postgraduate provision is a key aim of the Higher Education Strategy, 'Graduating to Success'. This solution, which is unique within the UK, will make postgraduate study much more accessible.

The number of additional STEM Undergraduate places has been increased by 1,400. This increase remains in place, notwithstanding the wider reduction in the sector due to Executive Budget cuts.

A process has been initiated to double the number of PhDs supported by the state in Northern Ireland by the end of this decade. Starting from a base of 11th out of 12 UK regions in terms of PhDs per capita as measured by the Knowledge Index, Northern Ireland is on schedule to reach the top half of this table by this point.

The Alliance Minister has also facilitated the creation of Northern Ireland's first Doctoral Training Centre, under the auspices of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, in relation to photonics in order to tackle the world's growing data storage needs.

Further investments in research have been made. These include a new QR Formula to distribute funding towards research which places a greater premium on quality and international standards. Fresh targets have also been set in relation to Northern Ireland's drawdown from the €80 billion Horizon 2020 fund of the European Commission and a NI Contact Point network put in place to facilitate bids. The US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership has also been significantly expanded.

Under Alliance, the Open University was successfully devolved, becoming Northern Ireland's third university.

Capital investments include facilitating the relocation of Ulster University (UU) at Jordanstown into the new transformational campus in Belfast, the commencement of the new teaching block at Magee, the new South Tower at UU Coleraine, and new Computer Science, Law and Postgraduate facilities at Queen's University.

Working with Industry

Through the Assured Skills Programme Alliance, in government, has worked closely with inward investing companies and local employers to put in place bespoke training programmes to meet their needs. This close focus on skill requirements is a clear manifestation of how devolution can deliver, and has provided the critical difference in relation to job creation decisions.

The Alliance Minister has created and chaired working groups for the ICT, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, and Food and Drink Manufacturing sectors, involving Invest NI and other Government Departments and, where appropriate, universities, colleges and businesses themselves, to devise and implement Action Plans based around evolving skills requirements in critical areas of the economy.

The ICT Working Group has helped to facilitate the expansion of places in computer science at universities and a significant growth in application rates, the creation of new apprenticeship opportunities, the development of a new A-level in Software and Systems Development, and specialist Academies to facilitate conversion courses.

Under Alliance, a review of critical Management and Leadership skills has also been undertaken.

Widening Participation

Northern Ireland has one of the best records of participation in education, employment and training across the British Isles. For example, almost 50% of young people currently progress to higher education. However, more work needs to be done to consolidate progress and to further improve performance.

Under Alliance stewardship, the Department for Employment and Learning published Northern Ireland's first strategy for widening participation in higher education, Access to Success.

Funding for Maintenance Grants and Disabled Student Allowances has been maintained, in contrast to the situation in England.

Throughout the Alliance stewardship of higher education, the cost of tuition fees for local students attending Northern Ireland universities has been pegged in line with inflation.

Funding for FE Awards and Hardship Funds, and the budget for the Additional Support Fund, which supports people with disabilities to access further education, has been protected.

Engaging with People in the Labour Market

Youth unemployment was a feature of the economic downturn in Northern Ireland: while lower than the EU average it has tended to be at the higher end when compared to other UK regions. As a result of Alliance proposals and negotiations, resources have been available to establish a Youth Employment Scheme. This provided work experience opportunities and subsidies to employers. The provision of good careers advice, and the development of new systems of apprenticeships and youth training, which are well-entrenched in many European countries which also have lower levels of youth unemployment, have been designed, in part, to address some of the structural causes of youth unemployment.

Alliance also led efforts to secure Executive agreement on a cross-Departmental Strategy, entitled Pathways to Success, to assist those young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). When Executive funds were available, in addition to the Youth Employment Scheme, this Strategy supported 23 community projects under the Collaboration and Innovation Fund and over 1,000 Families to get support under Community Family Support Programme.

Through the European Social Fund, the Department is supporting 13 innovative ESF projects with a total funding value of £6.5million that are working with young people in the NEET category across Northern Ireland. These projects provide support such as a one to one mentoring service, confidence building, training and work placements, education and careers advice, job search and support with job interviews to secure employment.

Official figures released for the period January to December 2015 indicate that the NEET rate in Northern Ireland has fallen from 18% to 13.8% and the youth claimant count figures have also been consistently falling. The NEET rate has fallen from 39,000 (Jan-March 2015) to 29,000 (Oct-Dec 2015).

Under Alliance, a new Employment Programme, entitled 'Steps 2 Success', was created to assist those people who are long-term unemployed. Using the opportunities provided by devolution, this contained a considerable number of divergences from the work programmes deployed in Great Britain.

Alliance has also enabled the creation of the Northern Ireland's first Economic Inactivity Strategy, named 'Enabling Success'.

With respect to those with disabilities and the potential to engage in the labour market, under Alliance leadership, the Department for Employment and Learning has published a Disability Employment Strategy and led cross-Departmental work to develop a Learning Disability Transitions/Action Plan.

Alliance has also promoted gender equality. Women now make up the majority of enrolments within both higher education and further education. However, their choice of subjects is heavily segmented, with a marked underrepresentation in the crucial STEM areas which are most important to the future of the economy and will offer the most lucrative opportunities in the future. In order to best maximise life chances and to maximise the deployment of the marketplace of talent, gender issues have been a particular focus of reform of careers policy and guidance, with some particular interventions to promote women in STEM.

Changes in employment law, including the Working Families Act, provide for a more supportive environment for working parents, and will help with both retention and progression of women in the workplace.

The employment rate for women is considerably lower than that for men. This is a particular focus of the Economic Inactivity Strategy, which targets those with family, or other caring responsibilities, who wish to work but have faced barriers in doing so.

Employment Law and Relations

The Alliance Minister steered a major Employment Bill through the Assembly. This was part of a package of measures, resulting from an extensive review of employment law, intended to contribute positively to a local employment relations framework that is fair, effective and balanced in respect of the needs of business and a competitive economy, while protecting the rights of employees and providing a positive and supportive working environment. It is Alliance's view that supporting businesses is entirely compatible with having in place a robust system of employment protections, which support good employment relations and measures that support investment in our young people's talent. This Bill will establish a framework for strengthening employment protections and will support the earlier resolution of workplace disputes where that is feasible.

Alliance also inserted into the Bill powers which will allow action to be taken to deal with abuses of zero hours contracts. The legislation is not prescriptive but will enable regulations to be made about how zero hours arrangements are to be dealt with in future. This is a welcome approach which will allow proportionate and considered measures to be developed following further consultation.

The Bill also sets a framework that will require employers to disclose information relating to the pay of their male and female employees and will lead to the introduction of a strategy on eliminating differences in pay between men and women.

Alliance is committed to gender equality in the workplace in terms of access to opportunities, particularly in the crucial STEM areas, and retention and progression in the workplace. These often require family-friendly policies. Under Alliance leadership, the Work and Families Act introduced Shared Parental Leave and expanded Flexible Working. This offers mothers and adopters the option to end their maternity or adoption leave and pay early and share what remains with their partner. Parents will be able to share in a way that suits them and will have the option of being home together for up to half a year following the birth of their child. These new rights will enable both mothers and fathers to keep a strong link to the workplace, but will work best when employers and employees arrive at a pattern of leave that suits everyone. Shared parental leave and pay are intended to support a gradual culture change in workplaces, giving fathers more confidence to talk to their employers about taking time off for childcare and challenging expectations about women's choices around work and home responsibilities.

Shared Future Policy Proofing

Under Alliance leadership, Shared Future Policy Proofing has been introduced into the processes of the Department for Employment and Learning. All new policies introduced are subject to assessment to determine whether they contribute positively to a shared society or inadvertently reinforce divisions or provide services on a segregated basis. Policies that tend towards separation can be avoided, while those that are neutral or positively advance a shared future can be favoured. This policy tool is broader than the current good relations aspect of equality proofing.

Demonstrating Delivery

Department of Justice

Over the past six years Alliance has driven a wide-ranging and radical programme of reform to reshape Northern Ireland's justice system. This has resulted in the delivery of faster, fairer justice, placing victims at the centre of the justice system, and reducing offending and reoffending through a focus on community safety, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.

These are fundamental reforms, which are laying the foundation for further improvements in the years ahead. While the full benefit of these reforms will not be realised for some years, they are already having a positive impact on outcomes for victims, offenders and our community.

Key Achievements

- £21 million has been channelled towards reducing crime and enhancing community safety.
- Developed a five-year Victims and Witnesses Strategy.
- £3 million distributed 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 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: average time taken to produce a forensic report has been reduced by 40%.

Increased Community Confidence and Engagement in the Justice System

With a locally accountable Minister, Alliance has increased community confidence in the justice system by implementing reforms to increase citizen engagement, and improve justice outcomes. Within two years of devolution, Alliance created new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in each council area, bringing together local people and all relevant agencies to identify and address local policing and community safety priorities.

Since then, some £21 million has been channelled through these partnerships towards reducing crime and enhancing community safety. Over the six years that Alliance has led the Department of Justice, public confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system has increased; people's confidence in the PSNI has increased, both locally and across Northern Ireland as a whole; fewer older people feel unsafe in their area; and public perceptions of how well police and other agencies are tackling anti-social behaviour and other crime issues in their local areas has improved.

Victims and Witnesses

Alliance has worked to place victims at the heart of criminal justice, focussing on the services and support they need as they journey through the system. Taking account of recommendations from Criminal Justice Inspection, the Assembly's Justice Committee, and an EU directive, a five-year Victims and Witnesses Strategy has been developed, which is now being implemented.

Measures have included the development of a statutory Victims Charter, setting out the rights and entitlements that victims can expect to have reflected in their experience of the system. Information on these new services is automatically provided to every victim, who can avail of a range of support, including the use of a Registered Intermediary to support vulnerable victims and witnesses. This scheme has been of particular benefit to people with a range of communication difficulties: including young children and people with learning disabilities or autism. Around half of those who have been supported through the system have been victims of sexual crime.

Alliance removed the upper earnings and capital limits for persons applying for the protection of a Non-Molestation Order, with the result that no-one should now be refused legal aid to obtain a non-molestation order in the Magistrates' Court because of their financial status.

Research has demonstrated that since Alliance took on the Justice portfolio there has been an increase in the percentage of victims who were satisfied with the information they received about the criminal justice process; an increase in the percentage of victims who were satisfied with how they had been kept informed about the progress of their case; and an increase in the percentage of victims who were satisfied with the contact they had with the criminal justice system.

Offender Levy and Criminal Assets Scheme

Aimed at making offenders more accountable for the harm caused to victims, Alliance introduced an Offender Levy that has resulted in around £650,000 being paid by offenders into a dedicated Victims of Crime Fund to support victims and witness initiatives. As well as funding a range of voluntary and community organisations that support victims, the fund has supported the roll-out of remote link facilities to help victims and witnesses give evidence, and the provision of an advocacy service.

Alliance secured an agreement from the UK Government to allow the Department of Justice to retain 100% of criminal assets received within Northern Ireland, with 50% going to law enforcement agencies and 50% going to a new Assets Recovery Community Scheme. This scheme has seen over £3 million distributed to community organisations to prevent and reduce crime and the fear of crime.

Tackling Crime to Make People Safer

Under-reporting of domestic and sexual violence and abuse is an acknowledged problem, but Alliance's aim to increase reporting of sexual and domestic violence is working: the number of police-recorded incidents is increasing across domestic abuse incidents and crimes, and sexual offences.

Committed to working in partnership across Executive Departments, under Alliance leadership the Department of Justice supported new Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences, which dealt with over 9,000 cases between 2010 and 2015, and joined with DHSSPS to open a new regional sexual assault referral centre. Determined to close gaps in the law, Alliance legislated to create new Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders, and for the offence of causing or allowing serious physical harm to a child or vulnerable adult.

The law enforcement response to human trafficking and the level of engagement on this issue, across and beyond government, has been significantly improved. Alliance has delivered new laws which provide a consolidated framework for human trafficking and slavery with: higher maximum sentences; the extension of the Anti-Slavery Commissioner's remit to Northern Ireland; and the introduction of a statutory defence for victims who have been compelled to commit certain offences. Support for victims is now set out in law, dedicated funding is in place, new arrangements for pursuing criminals have been developed, and a new system exists to ensure that justice agencies work in collaboration with non-governmental organisations to improve and extend their collective response.

In 2013 Alliance delivered Northern Ireland's first government-wide Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending, setting out how Executive Departments and community, voluntary and private sector organisations could work together to reduce offending. With twin objectives of reducing offending and improving outcomes for people who have offended, Alliance delivered a new system for measuring and tracking reoffending statistics. The latest figures available demonstrate a decrease in the actual rate of offending, and a decrease in the number of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system.

Alliance has modernised Northern Ireland's Forensic Science service to ensure it meets the needs of the justice system and the wider community. Outdated case-management and laboratory systems have been replaced, and a new state-of-the art laboratory has been constructed and equipped to deal with advanced DNA technology. Laboratory turn-around times in drugs cases have improved by 60% and the average time taken to produce a forensic report has been reduced by 40%.

In the Department of Justice, Alliance enhanced the law to tackle sexual offending by extending the scope of the current offence of possession of extreme pornographic material, bringing Northern Ireland's law in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Alliance has legislated to tackle tax evasion on fuel laundering to enable the Director of Public Prosecution to refer sentences to the Court of Appeal. In response to public concerns about sentencing in relation to animal cruelty, Alliance has legislated to increase the maximum sentences and fines available for the most serious animal cruelty offences, giving Northern Ireland the toughest animal cruelty sentencing arrangements in the UK.

Prison Reform

An issue considered to be "too difficult" by NIO Ministers, Alliance initiated a major review of Northern Ireland's prison system, and has already implemented 36 of the 40 recommendations designed to deliver a system focussed on the needs of Northern Ireland. This radical reform programme has shifted the prison system from its historic focus on security and containment towards that of rehabilitation, resettlement and the needs of modern-day Northern Ireland.

The Alliance Justice Minister has driven the implementation of reform, which has delivered: in the creation of Hydebank Secure College (the first of its kind in the UK and Ireland); a refreshed workforce more representative of the community it serves; the development of step-down facilities for male and female prisoners; the development of the prison estate; the introduction of Prisoner Development Plans for over 75% of prisoners; a partnership with the Department for Employment and Learning to transfer learning and skills in prisons over to the further education system; and a 20% reduction in the cost per prisoner place.

Reforming the Youth Justice System

Having identified the need to modernise how children and young people are managed within the justice system, Alliance commissioned a wide-ranging review of the youth justice system, and has worked to implement the key recommendations. Within two years of taking office, Alliance ended the long-standing, and internationally criticised, practice of imprisoning young people alongside adults, and introduced Youth Engagement Clinics that have dramatically increased the number of young people who are diverted out of the justice system through diversionary disposals.

Under Alliance, the number of children involved with Youth Justice Services has dropped. When Alliance took over the portfolio, approximately one in every 145 young people were involved with Youth Justice Services. Within four years that had reduced to one in every 200 young people. Delay in the youth justice system has also been reduced, with processing times for Diversionary Youth Conferences reducing from an average of 68 working days in 2010/11 to 38 days in 2014/15.

The number of children admitted each year to custody on remand, breach of bail and under Place of Safety legislation has reduced. Education provision in the Juvenile Detention Centre has been transferred to the Department of Education, bringing children who reside there back into mainstream education arrangements. Furthermore, legislation has been passed that requires all justice organisations to give primary consideration to the best interests of the child, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A Faster, Fairer and More Efficient Justice System

Alliance has tackled delay and delivered improvements in the speed of the justice system, to the benefit of everyone involved – victims, witnesses, defendants and the tax payer. Steps to streamline processes, eliminate wasteful delay, and improve victims' journeys through the criminal justice system have included measures to encourage earlier guilty pleas, and reforms to the committal process to remove unnecessary stages that traumatised victims with no justifiable benefit to the delivery of justice.

Alliance has delivered significant reform to Northern Ireland's criminal records disclosure service to assist employers to make safe recruitment decisions, protect vulnerable groups, and maintain people's rights to privacy. While keeping the costs of checks below levels of inflation, Alliance has delivered significant financial investment in new technology, speeding up the process and enabling better citizen engagement: with over 90% of applications now made on-line; faster processing; and targets exceeded each month. A new filtering scheme for old and minor information continues to provide safeguards but ensures that applicants' rights to privacy under the European Convention on Human Rights are maintained. A new Code of Practice has been introduced to direct police on what they should disclose, and applicants can now appeal to an Independent Monitor if they believe that certain information should not have been disclosed. For people under the age of 18 many disclosures are automatically referred to the Independent Monitor to ensure that disclosures are necessary.

Alliance has delivered significant legislative reform to speed up the justice system, including statutory case management to encourage swifter and more effective case resolution and reforms to the committal process. Cross-system working has been enhanced, and more robust performance measures have been reported on since 2011/12. These are beginning to show measurable improvements in the speed of cases, particularly in Youth and Magistrates Courts.

Alliance has legislated for the creation of a civilian fine collection service, which will 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.

Legal Aid Reform

While an indispensable part of our justice system, in the ten years before Alliance took on the Justice portfolio criminal legal aid costs had been allowed to almost triple, making it one of the most expensive legal aid systems in the world and unaffordable for taxpayers. This position was unsustainable, creating a danger that cuts, which would impact on the most vulnerable, would have to be imposed.

Determined to align expenditure with the available budget, while protecting the most vulnerable, Alliance has tackled these spiralling costs by introducing a range of reforms across the criminal and civil justice system. Alliance has legislated to create a new Legal Services Agency and to move to a new system of standard fees for Legal Aid payments. The Very High Cost Case structures have been abolished, and the number of cases where two barristers could be employed has been reduced. When all the current cases have gone through the system, these reforms will have resulted in an annual reduction in costs of around £24 million, while reform of the level of representation allowed in civil cases will deliver additional annual savings of up to £3 million per year. Only after all of these reforms were achieved, without impacting on access to justice, did Alliance consider limiting the scope of legal aid, and even then legal aid for vulnerable groups has been excluded from any consideration.

Working Across the Justice System and Beyond

Alliance has worked to ensure that devolved justice means better co-operation across and beyond the justice system. Alliance established a new Criminal Justice Delivery group, bringing together the leaders of the various justice agencies on key initiatives and reforms. A Programme for Justice has been developed, focussing leadership discussions on key issues including victims and witnesses, reducing offending, children in the justice system, improving the speed of justice and digital justice. In 2014/15 the Organised Crime Task Force chaired by the Alliance Minister saw: 94 organised crime groups frustrated, disrupted or dismantled; 5,104 drug seizure incidents; 27 fuel laundering plants dismantled; the seizure of over 600,000 litres of illegal fuel; and three million illegal cigarettes.

Alliance secured the necessary political support to have the National Crime Agency operate in the devolved arena, and established a new Joint Agency Cross Border Task Force. Partnership working within the Executive has developed too in key areas such as with the Department of Health, with the Department for Education on children's issues in the youth justice system, and with the Department for Employment and Learning to deliver better skills and outcomes for offenders.



Demonstrating Delivery

Northern Ireland Assembly

Alliance does not simply rely on being in the Executive to seek to bring about change. We have demonstrated that we are able to secure change from within the Northern Ireland Assembly. These changes have occurred as the direct result of having a strong Alliance voice in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Key Achievements

- Forced sustainability into marine conservation legislation.
- Streamlined the licensing arrangements for large stadia.
- Established the Northern Ireland Assembly's first environment week.
- After poor decisions on how to manage budget cuts, the Alliance Chair organised an emergency meeting of the Environment Committee to ensure that Environment Minister developed a funding programme for the environment NGOs.
- Ensured council meetings are more open and transparent to the public.
- In Westminster, ensured all big donations to NI political parties after January 2014 will eventually be made public.
- Secured the establishment of a Civic Advisory Panel.
- Ensured the Assembly supported the retention of the Human Rights Act and sent a strong signal to the UK government.
- During the Stormont House talks Alliance ensured integrated education was reflected in the Agreement.

Environment

Alliance has consistently prioritised the environment and we have taken a pro-active role in making sure it is protected. For example, we ensured that the Marine Act emphasised sustainability as part of its over-riding objectives. This crucial change in the law meant that environmental concerns will be central to the way we manage our marine environment. Alliance also established the first ever Environment Week, which connected politicians and the voluntary sector together in order to design higher quality policy. Alliance also reduced the impact of budget cuts on environment charities by organising an emergency meeting with the Minister to develop a funding programme.

Political Reform

Alliance has a strong record of pursuing an open and transparent government. In Westminster, Naomi Long persuaded the UK Government to ensure all big donations to NI political parties that have taken place after January 2014 will eventually be made public. Alliance also secured an amendment to ensure that local councils are required to record their meetings for public scrutiny and place papers for these meetings on the internet. This is alongside work Alliance councillors are currently doing to make sure their councils are open and transparent.

The parties have already agreed to reduce the number of Assembly Members in 2021, but Alliance was the only party prepared to ask that this be brought in for the 2016 election. This would have saved £11 million over five years. All the other major parties voted it down.

Finally, Alliance secured agreement to establish a Civic Advisory Panel. This panel will engage with civic society to help shape Northern Ireland's future.

Shared Future and Equality

Alliance tabled a motion which opposed the UK Government's planned repeal of the Human Rights Act. The NI Assembly successfully adopted this motion. This vote in the NI Assembly sent out a very powerful message about protecting the integrity of the Human Rights Act. While the UK Government may have paused on their efforts to repeal this Act with a commitment to fresh consultation, Alliance will show no complacency on this matter.

Chris Lyttle ensured that the Children's Services Co-operation Act placed good relations at the heart of children's services. This will mean that as departments co-operate to provide services to children, they will need to promote good relations.

After it was proposed by Trevor Lunn, the Assembly established an inquiry into women in politics. This committee report has stimulated the Speaker to establish a Review Group to take forward its proposals.

Alliance has already issued a public consultation on a regulatory system for the flying of flags on lampposts. We have aimed to create a constructive debate over this issue.

During the Stormont House talks Alliance ensured integrated education was reflected in the Agreement.

Licensing

Judith Cochrane has passed legislation reforming liquor licensing laws in outdoor stadia here in Northern Ireland, with the aim of allowing venues to hold a full and permanent licence.

Licensing laws have changed little since 1996, but Northern Ireland is a very different place today and is regularly hosting world-class sporting events. However, state-of-the-art multi-use stadia are not covered by the current legislation. A large amount of public money has been allocated to redevelop them, but unless this change happens we will not see them realise their full potential.

Local Champions

Alliance MLAs are strong voices for their local communities and have managed to effect change. For example, local Alliance MLAs have worked with local campaigners and councillors such as Cllr Kellie Armstrong to ensure Exploris, Northern Ireland's only Aquarium, was saved from permanent closure. After a rocky few years, funding has now been secured and Exploris will re-open soon.

We have also worked with local councillors, such as Cllr Andrew Muir, and residents in North Down and East Belfast in order to persuade the Department for Regional Development to intervene to protect Cairn Wood from being sold off.



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 every 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 the next and following 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 publish 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.

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.

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.

Racial and religious diversity

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 ensure 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 unidentifiable.
- Ensure the provision of free English lessons for all refugees, currently 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 do not need 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 for the Independent Living Fund.
- Provide specific assistance for disabled people and their employers to allow access to work, following the 'Employability Programme for Deaf People'.
- Assist with removing communication barriers and support the work of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Women

Alliance is a party that has always promoted the need for practical interventions to remove systemic barriers which prevent women from having equal opportunities. This has included supporting 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 needs to 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, provided that robust protections are provided through legislation to protect faith groups and religious celebrants who do not wish to marry same-sex couples.
- 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 and the lifetime ban on gay men giving blood, in line with the rest of the UK.
- Producing guidance for schools on tackling homophobic bullying.
- Going beyond the legislation that has removed any requirement to provide notification of abolished sexual offences, by seeking to provide pardons for people who were convicted under outdated indecency laws.

- 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 introducing 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 both devolved and non-devolved 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 want 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 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 which older people sometimes miss out on.
- Our proposals for health and social care reform can be found in the health section of this manifesto.

Political Reform

Stormont needs a transformation. For too long investment in public services and the economy has suffered as a direct result of the failure of leadership over crucial issues and the breakdown of functioning relationships between political parties within the Executive. This failure is between parties, and stems from a lack of trust, respect and partnership. However, the institutions have magnified the difficulties between the parties. This has led to missed opportunities as well as slow decision-making or no decision-making on some issues. It is clear that things must be done differently at Stormont.

Good governance is always critical for: integrity in public life; evidence-based policy decisions; the fair and impartial application of rule of law; respect for equality and human rights; and efficient and effective public services.

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

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 between cross-cutting issues.

In particular, the mutual vetoes granted to the largest parties have been counter-productive. While no institutional design can compensate for lack of trust and mutual respect between parties in government, structures can nevertheless be designed better.



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 sectarian designation in the Assembly.
- 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 de-politicise what could become a potentially polarising contest over which party has a claim to First Minister and which party is “relegated” to deputy First Minister. OFMdFM should remain a joint office.
- Subject the final make-up of the Executive to confirmation by the Assembly.
- Ensure that the negotiation of a Programme for Government creates a document which is strategic and outcome-focused. We are also committed to ensuring that this is a serious process.
- Reform the Petition of Concern system. A petition should trigger qualified majority voting, rather than a vote along sectarian lines. In the meantime, we will support a Protocol between the parties to prevent abuse of the Petition of Concern system. This protocol must limit the circumstances in which a Petition is used to matters of equality, human rights, good relations or avoiding something illegal.
- 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 preventing any party being able to veto sanctions against themselves.
- Establish an opposition, made up of parties who do not wish to enter the executive.
- Legislate to require greater co-operation between Ministers on specific issues.
- Ensure 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 creating a work plan that is informed by a Programme for Government in each jurisdiction.
- 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.

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 but we believe that 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 will encourage their speedy implementation.

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. 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 the 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 make-up 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.
- Oppose proposals on 'English votes for English laws' in Westminster. Our concerns are around a number of areas: complexities in deciding which areas are affected by a bill; the financial impact that many pieces of legislation have on Northern Ireland's block grant; concerns around English governance in the case of a 'split' election outcome in England rather than the rest of the UK; and concerns about an imbalance in the role of MPs from different parts of the UK.
- 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 these 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.

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 since 2010, Alliance will build on the reforms and improvements implemented to date, 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.
- 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 across 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 Alliance is already implementing, 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 Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister, 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, and will work to secure agreement on the following proposals:

- 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 has had significant successes over the last six years. Alliance has 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 last 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 re-offending.

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 has prioritised the examination of how the criminal justice system impacts on the young people who come into contact with it, and have 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 in the next mandate 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 last 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 has 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 last mandate, Alliance will:

- Introduce ambitious Statutory Time Limits, giving the criminal justice system a specified time to progress a criminal case. A consultation process is already underway, and Alliance will introduce the necessary legislation during the next mandate.
- 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 last 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.

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.



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.

The new Department for the Economy incorporates all of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and most of the current Department for Employment and Learning. This restructuring will better promote the needs of business, highlight barriers to business creation and growth, and ensure joined-up working.

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.
- Develop a robust 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.

Building on the successful implementation of the outgoing Executive Programme for Government, Economic Strategy and the Economic Pact, 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 be 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 to remain a member of the EU so that we have access to and influence over the EU's common market.
- 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 are such that funding is maximised for supporting business.
- Develop a social 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.
- Assist Northern Ireland's universities in drawing down greater levels of science and research funding from both the Research Councils and the European Union.
- 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 is a matter which 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 the uncertainty and create a stable and certain environment for investors.

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

- Create a long term, 40-year energy strategy, to provide a clear 'road map' toward addressing the challenge and one which covers all forms of renewable energy.
- 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 requirements 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 in Northern Ireland.
- 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 good number of vacant and closed up 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 to 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.
- Organising a comprehensive review of licensing legislation, run by both the Department of the Economy and the Department of Communities, in order to develop a modern approach that meets our leisure, tourism and economic needs.

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, and matching supply with demand, additionally 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 are leaving education without the security of a full-time job or are 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 level.
- 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 £85m 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 both with employers and with young people.

Further education

Alliance is committed to the full implementation of the new Further Education Strategy. In this regard, 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 support 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, and, to a lesser extent, other jurisdictions, we have the capacity to shape employment law and relations policy to take into account 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.
- Follow 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.



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.

There have also been a number of schools, based in particular sectors with the associated ethos, with significantly mixed enrolments.

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

Integrated 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 develop their own identity.
- Making it easier to standardise 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 to encourage, not merely to facilitate, the development of integrated education must be better enforced, and also fully applied through the new 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.

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 and mix 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.
- Piloting 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 did not believe that eleven is the appropriate age to make educational decisions that will restrict later choices.

However what has replaced it is arguably not much better. 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. The Education Minister has failed to engage 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 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 in maintaining a divided system and an underutilised 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, therefore, 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 most 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.

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 problems with and restrictions on the people of Northern Ireland 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 that of an effective system of health and social care, that in many respects is regarded as a world leader 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 in 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.

Alliance broadly supports 'Transforming your Care' as the existing policy framework to achieve better health outcomes more effectively. Its general thrust includes a greater emphasis upon primary care and services in the community. However, this endorsement is not unqualified and we are concerned over the 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 a visiting a minor injuries unit. Supporting interventions around public information and 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 creation of an independent panel, which in liaison with cross-party working group, would discuss and recommend a major package of reforms, including the future institutional infrastructure and further investments in transport for patients and visitors. These recommendations would then be subject to a straight 'yes' or 'no' vote in the Assembly. There is a need to establish a strong consensus around the direction of travel for this critical area, including from service providers.

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 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 our 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 co-ordinated crisis care and enhanced additional care.
- 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 has 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.

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 call for 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. For example, it means people cannot be discharged from A&E services and leads to 'bed-blocking' 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 was 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 from the European Horizon 2020 Programme and the UK Research Council.

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, Social Services and Public Safety has not followed through on the outcome of its 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 over the age of 80.

Social care can be provided in a range of settings. Alliance wants the system to encourage 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 supports 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.

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.

Alliance also believes that the uncertainty regarding Junior Doctor Contracts in Northern Ireland should be resolved, that professional staff should be appropriately regarded and that a premium should be placed on patient welfare and safety.

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 support giving 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 young, adult and older carers across Northern Ireland, many of whom themselves have health conditions or disabilities. There are well over 200,000 people providing caring support in Northern Ireland alone. 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 also 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 current changes proposed by the Conservative Government in Westminster and would oppose the associated welfare reform legislation. 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 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.
- Proposing that European funding be made available to develop new social housing, similar to a recent project in the Republic of Ireland which used European Investment Bank match-funding to develop social housing.
- 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 2017.

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 sharing 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:

- Demonstrate that future public investment will establish that 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:

- Oversee the transfer and implementation of the remaining regeneration powers 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 the authorities.
- Make best use of European funding programmes to secure additional money for regeneration.

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 the raising arts spending to at least the average spend on arts in these islands per capita, and review how to make this spending effective.
- Establish an Arts Funding Review to examine if this funding can 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 supports the creation of a Comprehensive Languages Act. Public bodies will produce language schemes to address the language needs of those individuals who use their services.

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 rather than a 'rights-based' approach.
- Supporting the development of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots Heritage.
- Recognising and supporting the development of British and Irish Sign Languages.

Local Government

Alliance were strong proponents 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:

- 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 and monitor 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, UK Government and EU Commission, 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.
- Urge the UK Government or the NI Executive to access emergency EU funding to help with flooding problems.
- 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 EU 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:

- Encouraging the development and funding of programmes to restore wildlife and biodiversity. Where appropriate this would include an all-island approach to wildlife management.
- Ensuring the full implementation and enforcement of directives that protect biodiversity, such as the Birds and Habitats directive. The upcoming mid-term review of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy provides a strong opportunity to do this.

- Celebrating and defending existing laws such as the EU Birds and Habitats Directives which provide the foundation for nature conservation in this country.
- Preserving existing woodland and increasing efforts to increase the amount of woodland. This will include better marketing of funding which does exist to do this and assessing which publicly-owned land would be appropriate for woodland cover.
- Implementing the Water Framework Directive, ensuring maximum opportunities to protect and restore our wetlands. 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 contributes £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.
- 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. As a result, we want all relevant levels of government to be focussed on helping to support this crucial, and often forgotten, industry. We support continued membership of the EU which benefits NI's farming sector hugely. We will reform this by:

- Limiting Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) 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 Basic Payment Scheme 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 CAP funding is used for rural development projects to 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. We will re-invigorate the industry by reforming the Common Fisheries Policy to:

- Support the fishing industry in moving to more sustainable methods of catching fish.
- Move from a top-down method of deciding fish quotas to one where EU member-states have a strong role. This means that quotas can be flexible and efficient rather than centralised.
- Incorporate long-term, regional stock management plans to ensure that fish stocks remain at sustainable levels.
- Ensure the ban on 'discards,' which results in dead fish being put back into the sea, remains in place.
- Provide investment in fishing skills so that fishing communities can continue to have a renewal of labour.
- Audit fishing infrastructure across Northern Ireland to identify where investment could be targeted.
- Develop an Inland Fisheries Strategy to ensure that fish stocks are sustainable and that watercourses are clean.
- Support 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 also 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.



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 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.
- 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 a ratio of spending cuts and revenue rises. Both the UK and Irish governments dealt with their recent deficit reduction programmes by using a mix of spending cuts and revenue rises.

Our view is that revenue could be raised from those who can 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 will 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.
- Continuing to set ambitious targets for the drawdown of European funding and ensuring departments are proactively seeking additional European funds.
- 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.
- 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 Departments or spending areas and also the balance of spending 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 from EU sources.
- 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 about £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.

Alliance believes that the introduction of fair 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 of 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 lowest 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 principles around revenue-rating that we have set out in the Finance section of this manifesto.

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 and European funding.
- 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.

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.
- Adopting 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 will need to 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 an early decision on airport capacity in the south-east of England. We will also push for a decision to recognise 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 and in particular with the European Union. 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 European Union.

Northern Ireland in Europe

Alliance is whole-heartedly pro-European. We are ambitious and positive for the role that the European Union (EU) can play in Northern Ireland.

Alliance supports the EU because it has broken down barriers between people. Just as Alliance supports overcoming divisions in Northern Ireland, we also support overcoming divisions between states, regions, nation and communities across Europe.

Northern Ireland's membership of the EU is an important boost to our economy and status in the world. We absolutely reject claims that Northern Ireland would be better if the UK left this important organisation.

This is especially true here in Northern Ireland because of our links with Great Britain and our close economic relationship and land-border with the Republic of Ireland.

As a result, we will support continued membership of the EU and advocate a "Remain" vote in the upcoming referendum.

Following on from our best ever European election result, Alliance will continue to ensure that Northern Ireland has access to the benefits that should be coming from Europe. In particular we will focus on:

- Scrutinising the EU's actions in Northern Ireland to ensure they focus on integration, not divisions. This is particularly important in regard of PEACE IV funding.
- Boosting our economy by supporting access to a large single market for Northern Ireland's businesses and to ensure we make the best use of the EU funding that is available for innovation, research, skills and infrastructure. Specific targets and information-sharing will assist with this.
- Protecting the environment by ensuring a Europe-wide approach to reducing pollution and mitigating environmental degradation.
- Creating sustainable, skilful and innovative farming and fishing sectors. This will require partnership working between the Northern Ireland Executive, the EU and the farming and fishing sectors.
- Solidifying links so that the EU can ensure simple and effective cross-border action on crime.

More examples of our policies to maximise the benefits of EU membership can be found in our recent European manifesto, available at <http://allianceparty.org/document/manifesto/alliance-2014-european-manifesto.pdf>.

This manifesto also includes a comprehensive section on how we would reform the EU.

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.

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