



**Step Forward  
for our  
community**

The Alliance Party Manifesto  
for Local Government

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A PDF of this Manifesto can be downloaded from [www.allianceparty.org](http://www.allianceparty.org)

## Introduction

Local government in Northern Ireland is changing. Not only will there be fewer Councils, but they will have much more responsibility. They will now be in charge of local services such as community renewal and planning.

This will mean that, more than ever, it is essential that Northern Ireland elects Councillors who will lead change in their community.

Alliance Councillors will be committed to this.

We will do this by focussing on the key issues facing local communities across Northern Ireland, such as creating a shared future, increasing prosperity, protecting the environment and ensuring we have access to cultural and leisure facilities. This should be what your local Councillors focus on – not the old issues of the traditional parties.

**This focus on the real issues that matter – economy, sustainability, well-being and inclusivity – is all the more important when our Councils will be looking after the issues of real importance to our communities.**

There is an opportunity to change Northern Ireland, starting at the community level. We all know people who are committed to the causes that will move Northern Ireland forward. If we can elect district Councils that are also committed to these causes, it will be a step towards changing Northern Ireland's politics completely.

That is what electing Alliance Councillors will do for your community. It will be your chance to make sure that your Councillors are committed to the causes we outlined above. Voting Alliance in this election will help to transform your local community – and this will be a step forward throughout Northern Ireland.

**A vote for an Alliance Councillor is the best way to vote for a new, modern Northern Ireland.**

## Shared Future

Tackling the division in our society and building a shared and prosperous future for Northern Ireland will be the main priority for all Alliance Party Councillors in the new Councils. This will be a major challenge for the new Councils, but one that they are equipped to meet. The new district Councils will need to use their new powers to make sure that they work to improve quality of life for everyone in our community.

Alliance believes that building a shared society is the best way to ensure district Councils deliver first class services, economic progress, social justice and sustainability for everyone.

Alliance maintains that creating a shared future is the greatest challenge facing Northern Ireland. At a time of financial and economic difficulties, we would stress the two way links between a shared society and economic progress.

### Alliance Councillors will...

*... deliver leadership and investment in initiatives to promote good relations across the community*

Support for local initiatives to deliver progress is at the heart of the change that Northern Ireland needs. Every part of our society has to work together to make Northern Ireland the shared society that people deserve. District Councils should be at the forefront of this work.

Alliance has championed integration, respect and sharing at a local level. We recognise that the manifestations of Northern Ireland's divisions in some areas are different from those in others. That is why, for some initiatives, we believe that taking a local lead is best. We will support schemes that will help heal divisions in our society by bringing people together and promoting tolerance and understanding. We believe every Council should have a coherent programme to fund and support community cohesion and good relations in their area.

**In your local Council, Alliance will support schemes that develop community relations and build a united community.**

### Alliance Councillors will...

*... stand up for power-sharing, transparency and accountability in district Councils*

The practice of hoarding top civic positions, like mayors and committee chairs, for one or two parties has meant that whole swathes of the electorate are disenfranchised and sends the message out that one group of people "owns" the whole Council. A modern approach to politics means that we must share power between different groups in our society.

Alliance will always support a fair power-sharing deal, meaning that parties will be entitled to civic position on the basis of their share of the votes cast – not who their friends are. We will support the fairest allocation of these seats, using the STV method wherever possible. This is the system we use to elect our Councillors so it should also be the system our Councillors use to elect the mayor. Alliance Councillors will never support a sectarian carve-up of seats.

Alliance has already secured, through their hard work in the Assembly, new laws which will require Councils to record their main meetings and place the recordings on the internet, along with the agendas, minutes and papers which should be made public.

**In your local Council, Alliance will ensure that power is shared fairly.**

## Alliance Councillors will... ... tackle division

The new district Councils must play a leading role in breaking down division and tackling sectarianism, and now have practical opportunities around community planning, Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP), and new Peace IV funding.

Alliance has always placed tackling division at the heart of what it does – whether in Westminster, the Northern Ireland Assembly or your local Council. We will make sure that we continue this important work if elected. Examples of issues we would support to tackle division would include:

- A region-wide approach to flag-flying on civic buildings, where the union flag flies on designated days, as is the case for other government buildings in Northern Ireland. Failing this, we will support designated days policies in the Council.
- Working with communities and the Executive to replace paramilitary and other sectarian murals.
- Ensuring that all new spaces are designed to be shared spaces – freely accessible to all people. We will use new community planning powers to ensure this.
- Only using Council resources to support bonfires if commitments to safety, environmental and anti-sectarian are met.
- Using the Police and Community Safety Partnerships to promote good relations and ensure public confidence in the police and respect for the rule of law. We will also consider changing the law so that the largest Councils have more than one PCSP.
- Investing in community relations and reconciliation groups. We will especially do this around interface barriers to help meet our long-term aim of them.

**In your local Council, Alliance will work to tackle division and promote a shared future.**

## Alliance Councillors will... ... represent everyone

Alliance knows that there are many people in our society who are often left behind by the political process and a political system that focuses on unionism and nationalism. Examples of groups that face discrimination include ethnic minorities, LGBT people, women, older people, people from lower-income backgrounds and disabled people. It is essential that all of these groups are included in district Councils' work.



As a party of diversity, Alliance Councillors will ensure that all Council decisions take account of the impact on all groups within society and where appropriate we will devise specific plans to make sure services are available on an equal basis. We acknowledge that reaching out to some groups of people needs different approaches to achieve the same result. We will also work across society to ensure that politics is as diverse as our society.

Alliance has always campaigned on behalf of young people and we will make a special effort to ensure that young people are engaged with the work of the district

Councils. We will support the drawing up of district-wide strategies for young people to involve them throughout the Council's work.

**In your local Council, Alliance will promote diversity.**

## Alliance Councillors will... ... build a shared future

Promoting a shared future needs to be central to the new Councils' work. This can't simply be an add-on or a tick-box exercise, but instead must be central to everything that our new Councils do.

Alliance has a proud record of not only promoting cross-community politics but also making sure that policies are "shared future-proofed", meaning we will be able to tell if they harm or help our move towards integration. This includes assessing new policies for their impact on sharing space, reducing tensions and removing the physical manifestations of division. Alliance has already done this in the Executive and believes that this should be run in parallel with equality screening.

**In your local Council, Alliance will ensure that policies deliver a shared future, rather than a divided society.**



## Alliance Councillors will... ... work to build community confidence in policing

Although policing remains the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive, district Councils will have a vital role in creating links between the community and politicians. These links ensure that the community can have confidence in the police and that the police reflect the needs of local communities.

Alliance has a strong commitment to the rule-of-law and believes that a shared future can only come about when local communities feel connected to their police force. We recognise that local politicians have a role in promoting the need to uphold the law and to ensure that policing is local. Alliance will help develop trusted policing in local communities by:

- Considering if district Councils would benefit from more than one district policing partnership (as is already the case in Belfast).
- Taking a strong stand against all unlawful behaviour regardless of the circumstance. Councillors should be held to a higher standard and should not encourage or engage in law-breaking.

**In your local Council, Alliance will build confidence in the police and support the rule of law.**



## Economic Growth

The new district Councils will have greater powers than ever before to stimulate economic growth and job creation. They will acquire new powers over planning, regeneration and tourism that will enable them to make a real contribution to the local economy.

Alliance believes that this will help make sure our local communities have the best-fit economic solution for them. It will also help to get Northern Ireland's economy going by making sure that every part of the region is meeting their economic potential.

**In your local Council, Alliance will work to promote the local economy.**

### Alliance Councillors will...

*... work to regenerate high streets and town centres  
for everyone*

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. These are usually the economic heart of communities across Northern Ireland and need support to ensure that all parts of Northern Ireland are involved in economic growth.

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.

Alliance Councillors will develop a comprehensive strategy to rejuvenate high streets and town centres including persuading the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce reforms where necessary. This would include:

- Reforms 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.
- Support for 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 for funding investment.
- Easier access for cars and public transport to local high streets and town centres, included promoting free short-term parking.
- Continuing to support the passage of the Licensing of Pavement Cafes Bill.
- Changes to planning guidance to make it clear town centres are preferred for retail and business development and to make it easier to apply for change of use applications to reflect economic trends.
- Kick start wider government support for small and independent businesses, including business rates reform, improving access to finance and promoting entrepreneurship to young people.

**In your local Council, Alliance will endeavour to regenerate your local high street and campaign for the Executive to take further action.**

## Alliance Councillors will...

*... use new community planning powers to include you in the rejuvenation of your community*

District Councils are the best placed to identify local needs and co-ordinate with other bodies about this. At its heart, community planning must extend from simply identifying needs and actions to joint delivery of goods, facilities and services. It is also critical that the community planning model fully takes into account and is reconciled with the forthcoming Police and Community Safety Partnerships, and also that good relations duties and the implementation of local aspects of a strategy for a shared future are taken into account.

Alliance supports putting local communities back in charge of community planning and will use this power to promote a coherent plan for your local economy. We will make sure that economic growth, environmental concerns and well-being are all balanced in a community planning programme. We'll also only support plans which we think will tackle division and make sure that all public space in Northern Ireland is shared.

**In your local Council, Alliance will promote the long-term future through community planning.**

## Alliance Councillors will...

*... deliver value for money*

The new district Councils will continue to be in charge of setting the district rate – which is one of the two parts of the rates bill. However, some of their powers will be restricted by the Northern Ireland Executive. The way the rate is raised, and to what level, will have a significant impact on household finances.

We believe that there is a difficult balance to be struck between keeping the rates as low as possible and funding quality public services. However, we believe that all people should pay their fair share of the district (and regional) rate by removing the cap that stops the owners of the wealthiest properties from paying the same percentage rate as everyone else.

In addition, we will always seek to drive out waste and to streamline local services to make sure that district Councils are only spending the money they need to. In your local Council, we will make sure that money is not wasted so we can keep the rates low in these difficult economic times. Examples of this would include shared procurement.

**In your local Council, Alliance will support fairer rates.**

## Alliance Councillors will...

*... be a voice for and support for businesses*

With the new economic powers that will be conferred on district Councils, they will need to make sure that they are responsive to the needs of local businesses.

Alliance have always listened to small traders, independent businesses and Chambers of Commerce, which have always been the best source of information about the specific local economy. We believe that working together, businesses and government in Northern Ireland can make sure that the local economy creates real local opportunities.

Every local Council will find it easier to communicate with traders in their own way. However, some reforms due to take place in the Assembly, such as the introduction of Business Improvement Districts, will create structures that allow community business interests to be developed. We will seek to maximise these.

**In your local Council, Alliance will support establishing formal mechanisms to ensure the Council engages with local businesses.**

## Greener, Cleaner Communities

The new district Councils will have powers over a whole range of issues that affect the environment and help make cleaner and greener communities. The new Councils will be in charge of increasing the amount of waste that we can re-use and keeping our communities clean and tidy. They can also play a role in setting an example on renewable energy and reducing energy use.

Alliance is a pro-environmental party. We believe that tackling climate change is a priority and that the new district Councils should be at the forefront of this. We have a long record of supporting groups who wish to take action in their communities and arguing for investment at a district level. We are proud of our environmental record and will be the most active party on your Council on these issues.

**In your local Council, Alliance will fight for a cleaner, greener society.**

### Alliance Councillors will...

#### *... increase recycling and reduce waste*

Alliance believe that one of the most important tasks for the new Councils will be to improve the amount of waste that Councils recycle - making sure that we are not throwing out items that can be recycled and always looking to reduce the amount of rubbish that is sent to landfill. This is one of the simplest ways we can reduce our impact on the environment.



District Councils should be pushed to meet the highest standards by the Northern Ireland Executive. But they should also be supported to meet those standards. That is why we support a legally-binding 60% target on district Councils but with a Regional Waste Strategy to make sure that the infrastructure is in place to improve recycling in Northern Ireland.

**In your local Council, Alliance will push for easier access to better recycling facilities.**

### Alliance Councillors will...

#### *... lead change for renewable energy use*

Although most energy policy is decided by the Northern Ireland Executive, district Councils can play a significant role in reducing their own environmental impact and developing renewable energy on public buildings in their area. By setting this important example, we can also make it clear that Northern Ireland is committed to reducing our environmental impact.

District Councils should tackle their carbon emissions in two ways. They should make sure that their buildings are well-insulated and Alliance will push for Councils to examine whether their properties are suitable for solar or wind energy. This will help stimulate green investment in the area and will also reduce the cost of the Council's energy bills in the long run.

**In your local Council, Alliance will push for energy- and cost-saving measures to be installed.**



## Alliance Councillors will...

### ... ensure that planning decisions are locally accountable

The new district Councils will also be in charge of making planning decisions for some types of development in Northern Ireland. This is an important new responsibility. It will also mean planning decisions are locally accountable.

However, planning decisions must 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 will also continue to campaign for more transparency in the political system, especially around donations to political parties, to ensure that councillors making planning decisions are doing so openly. We will argue for training to be available to all Councillors to assist them with these roles.

We will also lobby the Northern Ireland Assembly to introduce third-party rights of appeal in planning decisions so that local communities will have the same right to object to planning decisions as developers.

**In your local Council, Alliance will support making sure that decisions on planning applications are transparent and community-based.**

## Alliance Councillors will...

### ... provide cleaner and tidier streets

The new Council will have powers to make our streets and public places cleaner. This will mean the opportunity to address litter, cleanliness and appearance across our neighbourhoods. This is a key job for district Councils and is best performed by them because they can respond more quickly to local concerns.

Alliance Councillors will push to make sure your community is as clean as possible. This will mean using our position on the Council to push for:

- More street-sweepers to keep our streets tidier, including making sure they are out and about more at busier times.
- Investment in graffiti removal, prioritising sectarian or other offensive graffiti which intimidates as well as looks ugly.
- Introducing new techniques to reduce dog-fouling as well as providing more dog waste bins.
- Campaigning for more litter bins on our streets where they are needed.

**In your local Council, Alliance will fight for cleaner streets and public spaces.**

## Alliance Councillors will...

### ... provide sustainable transport options

The Northern Ireland Executive is in charge of transport policy, but the new district Councils can play an important role in making sure that sustainable transport options (such as walking and cycling) are promoted. They can also work with the NI Executive and Translink to ensure that public transport serves the needs of their community.

Alliance believes that green transport options should be pursued as a priority alongside other modes of transport. That is why we will support Councils adopting sustainable travel plans that make it easier for cyclists and walkers to get about town and will include advance planning about new bus routes. We will especially promote safe cycle routes and storage and suitable pavements and road crossings to encourage walking.

**In your local Council, we will make sure that all transport options, not just cars, are viable.**

## Well-being and Leisure

As providers of local recreation services, the new district Councils will play a significant role in delivering leisure services that we all value. For example, Councils will be in charge of running our leisure centres, maintaining parks and organising a whole range of community events.

Alliance believes that these services promote our local communities and allow us all to live rich and fulfilled lives. Councils should have two main aims when furthering well-being and leisure – the first should be making sure that well-being and leisure is accessible to everyone in the community, the second should be that well-being and leisure helps meet our economic and social aims.

**In your local Council, Alliance will deliver services that we all value.**

### Alliance Councillors will...

#### *... invest in local parks and green spaces*

Councils own a large number of green spaces and parks that they manage on our behalf and they should be available to all residents to use responsibly. These spaces include parks, children's playgrounds, allotments and other similar facilities. The new district Councils will be able to use these in order to promote well-being and leisure.

Alliance believes that district Councils should place protection of these green spaces at the heart of the leisure agenda and also seek opportunities to enable more people to use them – promoting their facilities and investing in them when needed.

**In your local Council, Alliance will conserve and promote green spaces.**



## Alliance Councillors will...

### ... support modern leisure centres and similar facilities

The new district Councils will be responsible for running some of our leisure centres, sports pitches and other facilities that help people to exercise and play sport. These facilities can be under threat from economic, financial and political pressures. However, district Councils should be making sure that these facilities are modern, accessible and well-used.

Alliance knows that in many cases these facilities are unique in a community and that they are central to people who want to live healthier lives. Examples such as the Aurora Centre in

Bangor show that, when a local Council takes a lead on rejuvenating these facilities, they can develop world-class facilities for the local community. Across the region as a whole, we can provide a wide-range of top-class sporting facilities. But the new district Councils will have to work hard in order to make sure that appropriate facilities are available.

We will also oppose the new Councillors spending ratepayers' money during a difficult financial time on new buildings for Council headquarters.

**In your local Council, Alliance will support investment in leisure centres and other sports and exercise facilities.**



## Alliance Councillors will...

### ... be advocates for the arts and heritage

Every part of Northern Ireland has the potential for a vibrant arts, culture and heritage scene and the new Councils will be able to play a significant role in making sure that this potential is realised. Working with local communities and the Northern Ireland Executive, they can play a significant role in making sure that everyone can take part in artistic and cultural events.

Alliance believes that these events help to create a better sense of identity for local communities and helps people to live more creative lives. Many people, from all parts of the community, benefit from a vibrant cultural scene.

Alliance is also committed to making sure that arts and heritage are accessible to everyone regardless of their backgrounds.

Many of the new district Councils will be in charge of significant arts centres and buildings which represent our heritage. Alliance believes that individual decisions on how to run these facilities are best made by district Councils and the facilities themselves. However, Alliance values facilities such as these and will seek to support them to a viable future. Facilities should be operationally independent enough to run their own affairs, but support (and sometimes funding) must come from the local Council.

**In your local Council, Alliance will support arts and heritage.**



# allianceparty.org

## Party Headquarters

88 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HE

Telephone 028 9032 4274

Email [alliance@allianceparty.org](mailto:alliance@allianceparty.org)

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