

Step Forward
Alliance ▶

Step
Forward
Not Back

Manifesto for 2015
Westminster Election

allianceparty.org

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Five Key Commitments from Alliance

Alliance MPs will:

Promote integration and a shared future by making sure UK Government money is linked to these aims.

Build a 21st century economy by developing the modern skills and infrastructure needed.

Invest in our public services, focussing frontline services and not administration.

Protect the environment with a Green New Deal to develop green energy and improve energy efficiency.

Transform our political system with a plan to increase transparency on donations and create an opposition.



Introduction by David Ford MLA

Alliance's task is to set out a bold, radical but realistic vision of what Northern Ireland could be, if people step forward with us and make it happen. A Northern Ireland where we take big steps forward.

Where we can afford to take big decisions on Corporation Tax because we're prepared to take equally big decisions about tackling wasteful division.

Where we don't insist on one-sided policies on flags or decisions on parades.

Where the first priority in new councils is making local communities better places to live, work and play; not what flag to fly, what language to use on the letterhead, or what to sell in reception.

Where we celebrate the things that unite us, rather than commemorating the events that divide us.

Where children are integrated in schools – genuinely integrated in the classroom and playground, not segregated in a so-called shared campus – and where those schools deliver for all our children, not just some.

Where our colleges and universities are supported to educate and equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to contribute to society and compete in a global marketplace.

Where we have a health service that is effectively reformed and restructured to deliver world class healthcare.

Where politics is known for delivery, not dithering; where politicians work to unite people, and to build confidence, rather than to divide them and play to their fears.

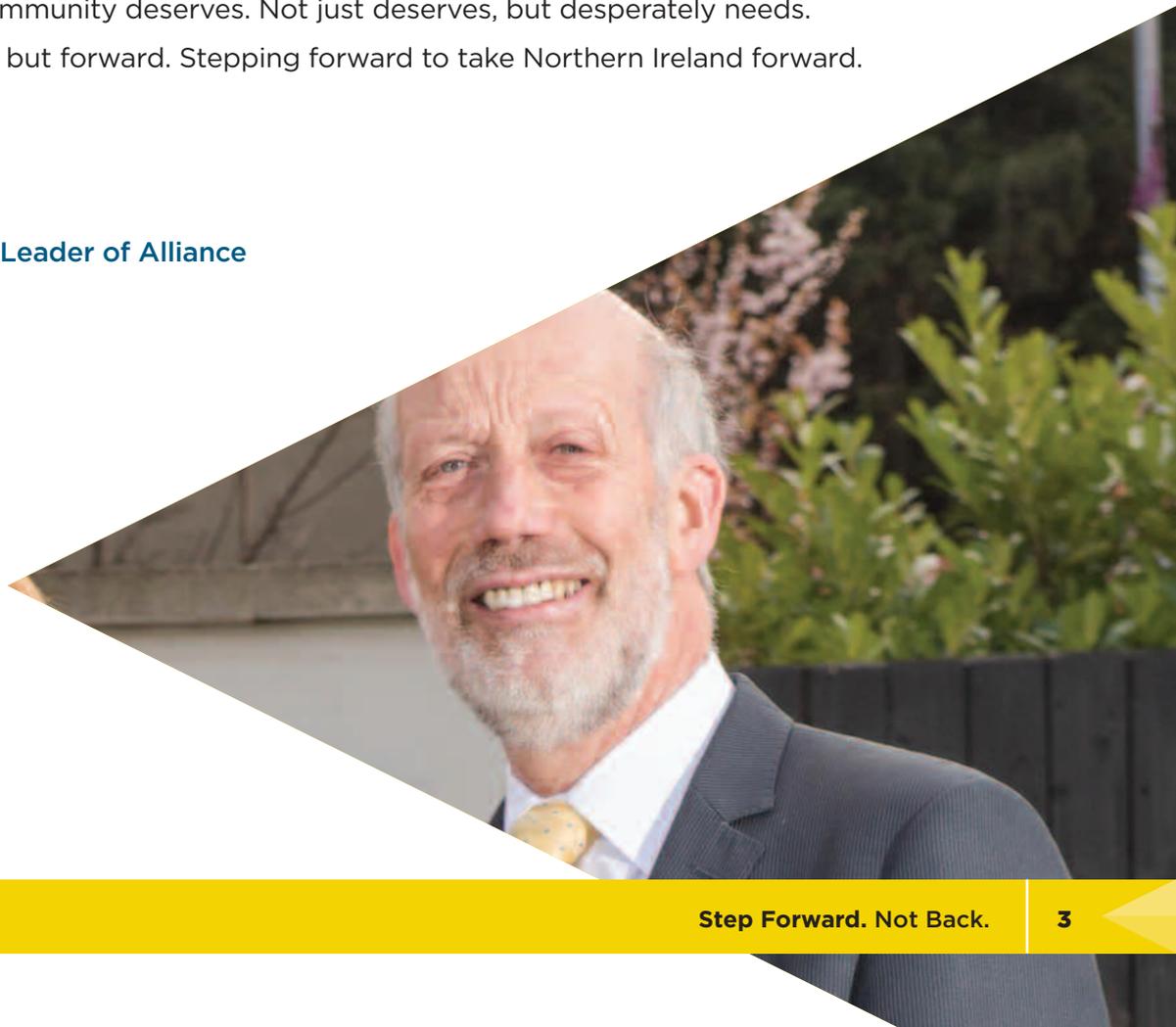
That's the Alliance vision. Unique in Northern Ireland. A message to inspire and motivate people.

Alliance is committed to that vision and to making it a reality. Determined to build the kind of future that our community deserves. Not just deserves, but desperately needs.

Not looking back, but forward. Stepping forward to take Northern Ireland forward.



David Ford MLA Leader of Alliance



Executive Summary

Alliance Priorities

Alliance will Promote Integration and a Shared Future

We will develop a comprehensive approach to promoting a shared future and reducing the cost of division, prioritising integrated education, shared neighbourhoods and promoting community relations.

We will provide solutions to difficult issues such as flags and parading and focus on making progress on reducing the number of interface barriers in Northern Ireland.

We will pass a Single Equality Bill in order to consolidate and enhance Northern Ireland's equality law.

Alliance will Build a 21st Century Economy

We will identify the cost of our divided society and produce a comprehensive plan for reducing this cost, so that money can be spent on job creation and public services.

We will ensure that we have the assets and ability to attract new jobs and establish new businesses by investing in skills, research and infrastructure.

We will support small businesses with specific plans to promote entrepreneurship and regenerate high streets.

Alliance will Invest in Our Public Services

We will reform the Health Service so that it offers a quality service across all areas, focussing on improving access to community healthcare, mental health and cutting-edge treatments.

We will invest in frontline education services by reinvesting the savings that an integrated education system would provide.

We will help people to find secure and affordable housing whether they are buying their home or renting in the private or social sector.



Alliance will Protect the Environment

We will implement a Green New Deal to significantly increase investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty.

We will act to protect the environment by introducing a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland and establishing an independent Environmental Protection Agency.

We will improve flood defences by using an evidence-based approach to determine what to build and assess how climate change will affect flooding.

Alliance will Transform Our Political System

We will open up donations to Northern Ireland parties to public scrutiny.

We will reform the Assembly so that there is a more normal government-and-opposition political system and that the number of vetoes is reduced.

We will support votes at 16.



Shared Future and Equality

Shared Future

For Everyone – a shared future in Northern Ireland

Most of the mechanisms for delivering a shared future for Northern Ireland, such as the powers to integrate education and build shared communities, are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, Westminster has an important role to play in ensuring that a shared future and good relations are central to Northern Ireland's work.

In particular, any borrowing the UK Treasury and Northern Ireland Executive embark on to develop infrastructure must, where appropriate, prioritise sharing. For example, investment in new schools should prioritise the integrated sector, and investment in housing and regeneration should be linked to ensuring space is accessible to everyone in our community. The Northern Ireland Office should ensure that all such projects are 'shared-future proofed'.

For example, the Economic Pact agreed between the UK Government and the First Minister and deputy First Minister was supposed to be based on the implementation of Together: Building a United Community, a programme to develop a shared future. There has been little monitoring by the UK Government that the commitments under Together: Building a United Community have been implemented. This is especially important following the Stormont House Agreement as the UK Government has pledged significant amounts of new spending power to the Executive. This must be spent in such a way that matches our ambitions for integration.

Key elements for Alliance in a shared future, which must be reflected in the UK Government's spending in Northern Ireland, with some delivered by the Assembly, would include:

- Achieving 20% of children in integrated schools by 2020 and a plan to significantly increase sharing in other schools.
- Making it law that the Housing Executive encourages and facilitates mixed housing.
- Requiring public bodies to promote shared space in new capital projects.
- Ceasing tolerance of illegally erected flags and emblems.
- Working with communities to secure the removal of 'peace walls'.
- Supporting a robust system for regulating parades which has cross-community support.
- Ending the sectarian designation system for MLAs in the Assembly.
- Requiring Departments to review Spending Plans to identify the costs of managing a divided society in the next financial year.
- Passing a Single Equality Bill.
- Delivering and implementing a Sexual Orientation Strategy and a Racial Equality Strategy.
- Securing cross-party agreement on a mechanism for dealing with the past.
- Introducing a Comprehensive Languages Act, covering Irish, Ulster-Scots and non-indigenous minority languages.

Parades, Flags and Dealing with the Past

We believe that the peace process remains under threat as the 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 have also raised tensions within our community and been cited as a justification for public disorder.

Alliance will continue to work to:

- Develop, as part of the process set-out by the Stormont House Agreement, 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 and a regulatory system for the flying of flags on lampposts.
- Support the full and timely implementation of the Stormont House Agreement relating to commitments to deal with the legacy of the past. This agreement reflects many longstanding Alliance proposals. This package will finally offer the opportunity to deliver truth, justice and support services for victims and survivors.

Community Cohesion across the United Kingdom

A major issue facing Northern Ireland is how to promote a shared, cohesive society and to preserve shared space. We must also respect for the rights of individuals and groups of individuals to celebrate cultural and other identities within our increasingly diverse society. This debate must be informed by human rights considerations.

This challenge is replicated across the UK. There are lessons that Northern Ireland can learn from governments and civil society. Similarly, there are lessons that other jurisdictions can learn from Northern Ireland. Alliance MPs would seek to facilitate such dialogue, including exchange of views and best practice.

Equality

Human Rights

We recognise that human rights are inherent and universal. They are an essential part of modern governance and protect the individual, from all backgrounds, from injustices. They also provide sensible limits on governments and allow governments to plan in advance for these limitations. 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 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.
- Avoid entrenching any particular view of identity, such as the notion of two separate communities in Northern Ireland, and accordingly, sectarian divisions.

Racial and Religious Hatred

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 that there is a coherent strategy in place to guarantee that racial prejudice is diminished and equality of opportunity is developed.

One particular proposal for those would be the need for legislation to 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.

People with Disabilities

Alliance believes that 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:

- Abolish the ‘bedroom tax’ which has a disproportionate impact on disabled people and their carers.
- Reform welfare assessments so that people with lifelong conditions do not need regular re-assessment.
- Advocate for the installation of both audio and visual announcements across all forms of public transport.
- Build on our record in the Executive to ensure a wide variety of education, training and employment schemes are available in Northern Ireland.
- Ensure a successor scheme to the Independent Living Fund is in place in Northern Ireland and protect existing payments to users.
- Provide specific assistance for disabled people and their employers to allow access to work, following the ‘Employability Programme for Deaf People’.

Women

Alliance has always promoted the need for equality and support for women.

This includes supporting women to reach their potential in work, public life and public services and removing systemic barriers which prevent women from achieving equality. We will continue to represent women, whose views are often under-represented 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:

- Setting robust targets for the uptake in Northern Ireland of UK-wide childcare schemes, as part of a comprehensive Childcare Strategy in Northern Ireland.
- 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 gendered violence by investing in welfare facilities, education and awareness programmes.
- Renewing efforts to tackle Equal Pay as well as requiring 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.
- Promote the need for access to education for women and girls to be recognised as part of the UK's international development spending, reflected in specific targets within the post-2015 Development Goals.

The LGBT Community

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:

- The extension of 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.
- Opposing the proposed 'Conscience Clause' which is poorly defined and is a charter for discrimination.
- Lifting the bans on gay and unmarried couples adopting and the lifetime ban on gay men giving blood, bringing these in line with the rest of the UK.
- Producing guidance for schools on tackling homophobic bullying.
- Asking every service to audit how their services are provided to LGBT people to ensure no accidental bias is included in the public services.

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.
- Legislate to outlaw 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 are available in Northern Ireland.

Democratic Renewal

A Changing Constitution

The consequence of the Scottish independence referendum will be 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.

In order to achieve this change across the UK we would:

- 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.
- Continue to support the devolution of Corporation Tax. Any decision to lower the levels of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland must be 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.
- Remain open to further tax-varying powers. 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 proportions of money as Scotland and Wales without Treasury approval. The UK Government should be empowered to set the overall debt framework for the UK's public bodies.
- Support the UK remaining part of the European Union. Our views on how Northern Ireland can get the best deal from the EU are contained later in this manifesto.

Transform Stormont

For too long investment in public services and the economy has been held back as a result of the almost complete failure of leadership over crucial issues and the breakdown of functioning relationships between the two leading political parties within the Executive. It is clear that things must be done differently at Stormont.

The public deserve better – we should no longer accept the status quo. A lack of commitment and ability to work professionally is stifling social cohesion, damaging communities and the prospects of our young people, and impacting on economic success. Politics must work for the entire community. Stormont needs a reboot.

Alliance has suggested a number of ways to secure a better functioning and more stable political system for Northern Ireland. These include:

- A coalition which is decided through voluntary negotiation between parties and subject to a vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Collective responsibility must apply.
- Replacing the Petition of Concern system, which has been abused. We need a voluntary protocol to make it less easy to abuse, as agreed in the Stormont House Agreement. In the long-term, we would prefer to see a system which does away with compulsory designations and is based on qualified majority voting.
- An opposition made up of parties who do not wish to enter the Executive. This opposition would be accorded additional rights to help them fulfil this job.
- Greater co-operation between Ministers requiring them to work together to agreed aims under law.
- Requiring all Executive policies to be 'shared-future proofed' to ensure that all public investment supports and underpins an open, peaceful and united society rather than continuing division.
- An end to sectarian designations in the Assembly.
- Letting the public know who donates money to political parties, building on work Naomi Long has done to ensure all donations from January 2014 will eventually be publically available.
- Reducing the number of Executive Departments to nine and reduce the number of MLAs elected per constituency to five in time for the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly elections.

Much of our proposed reforms would require further changes to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We agree with the implementation of these proposals, but we do not think that this should limit our attempts to introduce reforms elsewhere in the system.

Our Democratic Principles at Westminster

Just as Alliance stands for openness, honesty and fairness in Stormont, we will continue to do so in Westminster. We have always argued for reforms to make the political system more transparent and to ensure a constitutional settlement which is modern and sustainable.

Alliance has supported a number of reforms that would have made democracy fairer. We will continue to support:

- A fairer electoral system for elections to the House of Commons. Our preferred system is multi-member STV, the system we use for all other elections in Northern Ireland.
- Amending the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (more commonly known as the Lobbying Bill) to ease restrictions on campaigning activities by affected organisations and to implement a comprehensive lobbying register.
- Votes at 16 for all elections and referendums.
- Direct elections to the House of Lords. Elected representatives could be elected by proportional representation from the 12 regions of the UK, including Northern Ireland.
- A written constitution for the UK which entrenches devolution. This should be developed by a significant Constitutional Convention.

Finance and Economics

Public Finances

Following the most serious economic recession in a generation, countries across the world have been adjusting to a period where public expenditure is more restricted and economic growth is less consistent. Certainly this has been true in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Alliance is clear that robust and sustainable public spending is essential to underpin economic growth, and quality public services. Without a responsible and mature approach to expenditure, we are putting at risk our ability to deliver the sort of economy and society we want.

Deficit Reduction

The state of the public finances and deficit reduction have been some of the central issues of the last Parliamentary term and it looks likely that they will continue to be throughout the next one as well. Alliance accepts the principle that the deficit should be reduced and that government should not regularly spend more than it raises in taxes. However, Alliance believes that deficit reduction should be conducted fairly and would support:

- Using both taxation and spending cuts as part of a programme to reduce the deficit reduction. International best practice demonstrates that a ratio of 1:2 is preferable and this should be the case for the Northern Ireland budget as well as the UK's. We do not support budget consolidation based solely on cuts to public services and some form of progressive revenue-raising should be considered by the Northern Ireland Executive, including progressive proposals for a separate water charge, accompanied by a corresponding reduction in rates.
- That any tax or revenue raised be done so in the fairest and most progressive way possible; so that the wealthiest people in society pay a bigger proportional share.
- The implementation of tax transparency, such as required reporting on tax payments from businesses and a register, in order to ensure that avoidance schemes and tax evasion are better policed. This would be for both corporations and individuals.
- Better parliamentary scrutiny of borrowing and public debt during the budget process. There should be a specific vote to authorise borrowing for non-emergency purposes in Parliament so that it is openly debated.

Counting the Costs of Division

Division in Northern Ireland costs money. It is estimated to cost public services in Northern Ireland £1 billion per year. The financial costs of Northern Ireland's divided society are apparent in four respects.

First, there are the direct costs of policing riots, other civil disturbances and parades, the distortions to policing that arise from security threats, and the costs to a wide range of agencies in repairing damaged buildings and facilities.

Second, 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.

Third, related to the second aspect, there are hidden factors linked to division, which impact upon the issues that Departments and agencies have to respond to.

Fourth, 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.

Politicians in Northern Ireland must recognise that we have a responsibility to tackle division and its costs. We believe that we must make taking care of our own financial troubles a centrepiece of any request for additional expenditure from the Treasury.

The Executive must therefore take the following actions to assess the current problem:

- Ensure the Stormont House Agreement's commitment to an independent audit of the cost of division is delivered.

Acknowledge the financial implications of division in Northern Ireland, commit to presenting a practical plan to tackle these issues immediately and embed these plans in the next Programme for Government.

The Executive must therefore take the following actions to prevent similar problems from building up in future:

- All major policies will be proofed for their potential impact on sharing versus separation through 'shared future policy proofing'. Alliance Ministers in the Departments of Justice and Employment & Learning have already pioneered such programmes so this could be rolled out immediately.
- All Departments will be obliged to actively encourage de-segregation and to promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.
- Proposals which are communally confined must undergo a cost-benefit analysis alongside an integrated alternative.
- Shared future considerations will be fully integrated into all future Departmental economic and social policies and programmes, including the next Economic Strategy.
- Ensure that public sector agencies build new leisure, educational, health, social and community facilities with an explicit objective to ensuring sharing, without any impact of intimidation. Best practice must also be developed regarding the design of the urban environment, in order to maximise cross-community integration.

Taxation

Fair and Progressive Taxation

Tax evasion costs both the UK Treasury and developing nations' governments substantial amounts of money each year. This money could be used to promote economic growth and improve public services. Alliance supports a Tax-Dodging Bill to tackle this. In particular, this Bill should:

- Be introduced within the first 100 days of the new Parliament.
- Require foreign companies to pay tax on those profits generated from within the UK.
- Review current tax relief schemes to ensure they are meeting their intended purpose and are not-being exploited.
- Reform rules which allow companies to avoid tax in both the UK and in developing countries.
- Improve transparency by opening up companies reports into their tax activities to the public.
- Strengthen the enforcement of and penalties for tax evasion.
- Create a register of beneficial interests for all international companies.

Alliance will support taxation which is progressive and fair. We would support changes to taxation which meet our progressive and redistributive principles. As a result, we will weigh up any potential tax changes against this principle. In particular we support:

- Increasing the tax-free allowance for income tax so that lower-earners keep more of what they earn.
- An evidence-based approach as to what the highest rate of tax should be.
- A 'mansion tax' for on the most high value homes, provided there is a mechanism to defer payment for the asset-rich but cash-poor.
- Simplifying the payment and administration of income tax and national insurance.
- A lower VAT rate for tourism and hospitality, as is currently the case in a number of EU countries such as the Republic of Ireland, to ensure our tourism industry can compete.
- The removal of VAT for a wider range of health products, including both sanitary products and sunscreen.
- An international Financial Transactions Tax and, at a UK-wide level, retaining the banking levy.
- The maintenance of the current UK inheritance tax threshold.

Re-balancing the Economy

Modernising Our Economy

Northern Ireland has lost out as the result of a deeply unbalanced economy within the UK. Devolution should allow us to develop our own proposals for economic development, but it is important that those economic functions that remain with the UK Government should be exercised in a way that maximises economic development across the whole of the UK.

To achieve this, Alliance will:

- Support a National Infrastructure Commission which will identify the most important long-term infrastructure needs for the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland, and examine the costs associated with them. This will ensure essential information is included in the debate about infrastructure.
- Support a cross-portfolio Single Infrastructure Programme for infrastructure investment in Northern Ireland, which is based on need rather than Departmental allocations
- Support regional industries by boosting research, skills, infrastructure and innovation across the entire UK.
- Support the development of broadband, 3G and similar telecommunications projects in such a way that ensures all parts of the UK benefit from this technology. This will include a specific duty to roll out high-speed internet and telephony outside of large cities.
- 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.

In addition, we want to see Northern Ireland maximise its access to funding opportunities that exist on a UK level. The Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government must work together to ensure that Northern Ireland has the skills and ability to attract greater levels of funding from projects such as:

- The Green Investment Bank, which funds innovative environmental programmes.
- UK Research Councils, which fund academic research across the UK.
- EU Competitive funding for programmes such as Horizon 2020, Interreg funding and research funding.

The best way to do this is to raise the skills and capacity of the relevant organisations to ensure that bids for funding are of a high standard and are for appropriate projects. Close partnership working is essential between the UK Government in Westminster and the Northern Ireland Executive.

Air Connectivity

Air transport in Northern Ireland faces unique challenges because of geography and the range of flights available from Northern Ireland. In order to compete with other regions of Europe, air connectivity will need to be improved. Otherwise, businesses and 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, within the first year of the next Parliament, on airport capacity in the south-east of England. We will also push for 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.

Science, Skills and Innovation

Alliance believes that the future of the economy will be based on securing high-tech, highly innovative and highly-skilled jobs. In the Northern Ireland Executive our Minister has invested heavily in universities and skills.

Creating such an economy needs to be based on work that would be undertaken by both the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. Both have powers at their disposal that would enable Northern Ireland to invest heavily in the sorts of economy we will need to prosper in the future.

In Westminster we will support the following changes to improve the standing of science, skills and innovation:

- Increase investment in science and research through the UK Research Councils. There is a clear link globally between state investment in science and economic prosperity.
- Support Northern Ireland's universities in drawing down greater levels of science and research funding from both the Research Councils and the European Union.
- Audit how scientific infrastructure is lacking in the UK and ensure this is considered as part of the UK's scientific investment programmes.
- Specifically identify where gaps exist in both funding and infrastructure for science in Northern Ireland.
- Invest in a wide range of programmes to assist young people in gaining appropriate skills and by working with specific industries where appropriate.

Small Businesses and Local Economic Development

Alliance is also committed to developing the local economy in Northern Ireland, by focussing on local development and business growth. There is a role for Westminster in the development of this and Alliance MPs will work alongside the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that we develop the economy across Northern Ireland. In order to achieve this, we will:

- Encourage councils to develop a comprehensive strategy to rejuvenate high streets and town centres, and persuade the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce funding reforms where necessary.
- Work with councils to ensure that they establish a formal mechanism to hear the voice of businesses in their new community planning process.
- Argue for reforms to business rates that make it easier for businesses to set up in vacant premises and promote growth.
- Consider 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.
- Ensure economic policy is assessed for its impact on small businesses.
- Push for a comprehensive approach to the social economy with a dedicated Social Economy Strategy and associated funding. 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.
- Promote entrepreneurialism through skills and business grants.

Crime, Security and Justice

Immigration

Alliance is deeply concerned about the current immigration debate for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the language used in debating immigration perpetuates myths rather than providing evidence. This is in turn leading to a climate where anti-immigration views are legitimating racial stereotyping and enabling racial abuse. Our second reason for concern is that immigration policy is delivered inflexibly nationally and is based on wage levels in the south of England. The cost of living in Northern Ireland is lower than elsewhere and so potential workers may be unable to move to Northern Ireland based on wage levels here. Thirdly, we are concerned about the economic impact of anti-immigrant sentiments given that immigration contributes to the economy, provides tax revenue and attracts inward investment.

Alliance will:

- Pursue a rational debate around immigration that emphasises facts and objective analysis.
- Ensure regional flexibility is built into immigration strategy so regions with different wage levels or particular skills needs are able to attract new labour where it is needed. Specifically, remove the cap on non-EU migrants as this has been detrimental to attracting high-skilled workers and students to British companies. Eligibility for migration must be on the basis of merit and demand for skills rather than an arbitrary cap.
- Make the visa system simpler and easier for legitimate sponsors to fulfil their role.
- Work with our EU partners to develop an overall immigration framework which ensures safety for immigrants along with a fair European system for enforcement and administration.
- Continue to argue that the UK should fully contribute to its international obligations to look after refugees and people fleeing persecution on the basis of political opinion, religion, sexual orientation and other grounds.

Security and Liberty

Policing and Security Matters

Policing has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly for most matters. However, there is still a role for Northern Ireland MPs to promote crime prevention and public safety in Northern Ireland. Alliance is committed to an effective and accountable police service and to upholding the rule of law. In order to ensure this, Alliance will:

- Ensure, following its approval by the Assembly earlier this year that the National Crime Agency is operational in Northern Ireland as soon as possible.
- Ensure that the widely discredited letter scheme for On-the-Runs is not able to be used as an assurance in court. The issue of On-the-Runs must be resolved in a transparent manner that provides justice. We have proposed a tribunal-style system that takes place in public.
- Campaign for the investigation into Kincora Boy's Home to be undertaken as part of the UK-wide Independent Panel Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales led by Justice Lowell Goddard.
- Further reduce delay in court cases, including the introduction of statutory time limits in youth cases.
- Continue our strong opposition to domestic and gendered violence.
- Promote collaborative efforts to tackle global crimes which require an integrated national and international response. These include; human trafficking, fuel laundering and counterfeiting. We recognise that the profits from these crimes fund illegal organisations.

Civil Liberties and Media Reform

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:

- Continue to apply an approach to the most difficult issues in Northern Ireland which balances civil liberties and human rights.
- Oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act.
- Initiate a comprehensive review on protecting privacy and personal freedom from surveillance. This must include a reaction to the PRISM mass surveillance programme by re-writing our data protection regulations. The rules should ensure that people's right to secure data is strengthened and that national governments have greater oversight of security agencies' use of data-mining software.
- Oppose the expansion of governmental power to monitor phone and email records without suitable oversight. As part of this we would support a lessening of the provisions in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act and oppose the introduction of the Communications Data Bill in its current form.
- Propose the establishment of a statutory Civil Liberties Forum to advise government on issues around civil liberties and human rights.

The scandal around phone-hacking and related unethical practices by the press had a significant impact on the way in which the media is perceived by the public. The subsequent Leveson inquiry demonstrated a wide range of flaws in the current legislation surrounding the press. That is why Alliance will:

- Support the implementation of the proposals from the Leveson report, specifically around a statutory replacement for the Press Complaints Commission.
- Support the passage of legislation equivalent to the Defamation Act by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Welfare, Health and Families

Welfare Reform

Alliance did not support the Welfare Reform Act, which drastically reduced benefits for a whole range of people. Our MP, Naomi Long, opposed this legislation. However, we have always accepted that Northern Ireland is not in a financial position to refuse to implement these changes once agreed by Westminster. Benefit claimant rates here are too high, and employment levels too low, for a separate Northern Ireland benefits system to be affordable. 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.

Voting at Westminster on Welfare Reform

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 and ensuring that potential benefit traps are eradicated.

Alliance will support, as a minimum, the following changes to the welfare system:

- Repeal of 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.
- Removing onerous obligations being placed on people who are in receipt of benefits or for 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.

Financial Support for Children and Older People

Since 2010 there have been significant changes to the way that the state supports families to look after themselves. This includes assistance in helping to raise children and looking after older and more vulnerable members of the family.

Children

Expanding the provision of affordable childcare in Northern Ireland is good for parents and children and also has an economic benefit. It enables parents, especially women, to return to work. Alliance will develop affordable childcare opportunities by:

- Supporting the continued 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.

Carers

Alliance acknowledges the hard and difficult work carried out by carers in Northern Ireland. The role they play in providing support to loved ones allows them to retain their dignity and respect. We also acknowledge that the work, as well as the intensity of the commitment, can be emotionally difficult and place financial strain on the carers themselves. With an aging population there will likely be an increase in the number of carers, so it is important we improve the way that government supports them. Alliance will:

- Advocate for an increase in the Carer's Allowance.
- Support funding and legislation to entitle carers to respite provision so that they can have regular breaks from the responsibility of providing care.
- Push for a Northern Ireland approach to identify and support child carers and a strategy for alternative care provision where suitable.
- Ensure that the role played by carers is fully recognised as the Transforming Your Care plans are implemented.

Pensions

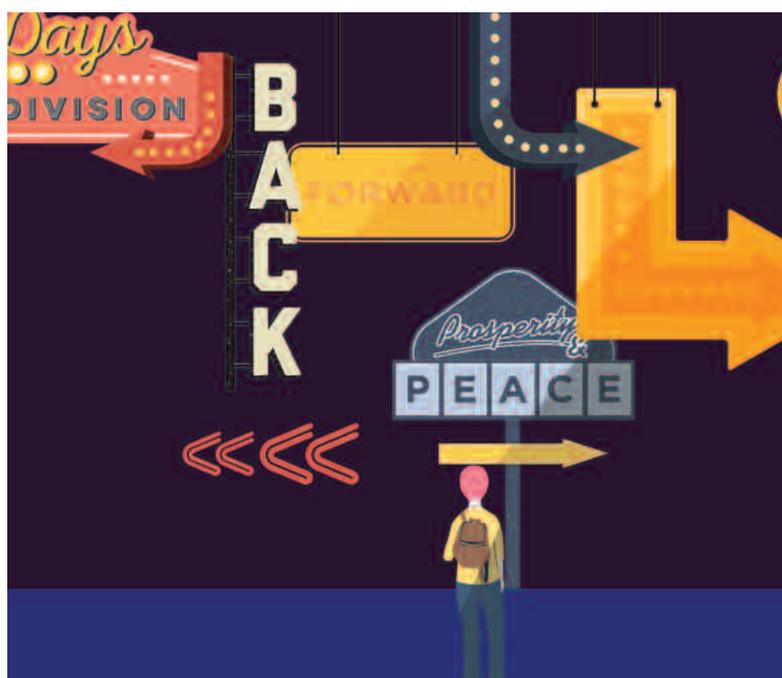
Alliance is committed to pension provision which enables older people to live independent and dignified lives. We have worked to reduce the incidence of pensioner poverty and we support many improvements to the state pension system such as:

- Moving to a position where a pension is paid on the basis of meeting residence requirements rather than 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.



The Health Service

Although the running of the Health Service is largely devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive, there is a need to ensure that there is joined up work between the various parts of the UK and with the Republic of Ireland. In addition, some aspects of health regulation and promotion remain the responsibility of Westminster so it is important that MPs work effectively to ensure Northern Ireland's concerns are heard in the development of policy and practice.

A Modern Health Service

We are deeply concerned about the way the health service has been run in recent years in Northern Ireland. There has been significant mismanagement of the health service by politicians and this has been exacerbated by the failure of successive Ministers to implement the reforms we need to ensure that the service is sustainable and safe.

Alliance supports the introduction of Transforming Your Care, a programme of reform that should deliver more community-focussed care in the future. We acknowledge that, on occasion, this may well see the reduction in the number of buildings providing some health services. We will judge these on a case-by-case basis, but in all instances, our views will be informed by the issues of patient safety and service quality.

Some other examples of areas where efficiencies should be pursued include:

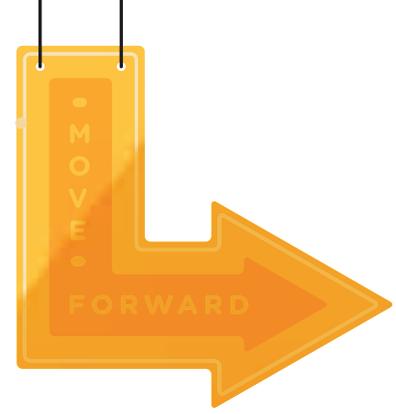
- Reducing reliance on Accident and Emergency (A&E) services. Too many people, due to a lack of information and long waiting times, use A&E as an alternative to visiting their GP, using an out-of hours doctor or visiting a minor injuries unit.
- Directing patients to the appropriate level of response in the health service as efficiently as possible.
- Placing a stronger emphasis on prevention, early intervention and use of the community and voluntary sector to deliver key services and support.
- Focussing on improving public health (quality of diet, exercise, smoking, etc.) to ease demand and cost pressures.
- Facilitating the better use of technology to support people in their homes, monitor and manage prescriptions and care for people remotely.
- Seeking better home and community services.
- Developing shared services on a north-south basis.
- Benchmarking of services to examine those areas where Northern Ireland over-spends compared to other nations will enable us to seek out and ameliorate inefficiencies.

Equal Access to Excellent Services

In order to ensure that Northern Ireland residents can have access to quality health services, Alliance will:

- Support investment in medicine and medical technology research. We will work to ensure that these are available in Northern Ireland on a similar basis to elsewhere in the UK.
- Support the development and use of new and cutting-edge medical processes such as the use of Mitochondrial Replacement Therapy, cochlear implants and CyberKnife radiosurgery.
- Ensure equal access to health services for the LGBT community, including lifting the unreasonable and unlawful lifetime ban on gay men giving blood.

- Teach first aid in schools so that more people have knowledge of these emergency and lifesaving skills and support the roll-out of defibrillation machines, accompanied by simple instructional guidance, in public places.
- Provide easier access to cancer drugs and treatments on the same basis in Northern Ireland as the UK. We will start by introducing a Cancer Drugs Fund.



Improving Mental Health

Alliance also believes that significant reform of mental health services should be prioritised.

This is particularly important for Northern Ireland, as one of the legacies of our past is a higher level of mental ill-health. For Alliance, support for people with mental ill-health must include:

- An end to stigma and discrimination associated with a history of mental ill-health. This will include amending archaic legislation which unfairly differentiates between a history physical ill-health and mental ill-health for certain types of employment.
- Placing psychological therapies at the core of the mental health services agenda.
- Promoting those services would mean earlier interventions and reduce the likelihood of relying on acute services at a future date.
- Improved follow-up support for people who attempt suicide, or who have suicidal ideation, through co-ordinated crisis care and enhanced additional care.

Given that there are potential for savings as a result of investing in the sorts of service provision listed above, we would support investment through the Northern Ireland Executive's own limited resources and potentially from a loan from the Treasury on an invest-to-save basis.

Improving Services for People with Learning Disabilities

Alliance believes that people with a learning disability deserve the best services possible. We will promote a joined up approach by all Departments, including the voluntary, community and private sector, when planning service provision. Alliance will:

- Engage and listen to people with a learning disability and their carers throughout this process to ensure we develop services that meet the needs, requirement and wishes of people now and in the future.
- Promote better day opportunities for people with a learning disability with a specific emphasis on transport needs.
- Support the implementation of the Transforming Your Care strategy and use it to improve services for people with a learning disability.
- Continue to advocate for joined up working across agencies and Departments to support people with a learning disability in all aspects of their lives.
- Improve the transition experience for families when a child moves from school into adult services.
- Create strong links between carers groups, support groups, people with a learning disability and government.

Supporting Stormont to Deliver Quality Public Services

Since the Good Friday Agreement, most public services have been delivered by the devolved institutions. Alliance supports this as we believe that Northern Ireland is sufficiently different to the rest of the UK (or the Republic of Ireland) to need our own circumstances to be taken into account. We believe that devolution gives politicians the potential to reflect the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland in our public services.

However, decision-making about public services does not take place in a vacuum. We know that decisions taken in Westminster do have an impact on how we deliver services in Northern Ireland for a number of reasons, for example; the financial context, new ideas and the need for strong links across the UK's public services.

In some areas, such as tackling climate change and investing in our economy, co-ordinated action across all areas of government is absolutely necessary. We cover these issues in the relevant section of this manifesto.

As a result, Alliance MPs will work to create a collaborative atmosphere between Westminster and public services in Northern Ireland. We will also offer constructive support to Stormont in improving public services.

Education

Alliance has long-supported a more integrated education system which teaches children from all backgrounds together. We believe that there are significant social, financial and educational benefits to this. Shared learning time and contact is the major cause of many of these benefits. In order to promote integration, Alliance will:

- Work for the introduction of an Integrated Education Bill. This Bill will provide a clear framework and system of support for the implementation of integrated education and ensure that the desire from the public for the integrated model is followed through by the next Assembly.
- Develop a formal definition of 'shared education'.
- Set a minimum number of shared learning hours and contact between schools in a shared facility.
- Monitor the spending commitment made by the UK Government in the Stormont House Agreement in relation to shared and integrated education. It is vital that any new capital build ensures that genuine integration takes place.
- Modernise and improve teacher training by promoting sharing and inclusion across the system.

We also believe that work can be done to improve the educational outcomes by children from across the community. In order to provide an education system that reflects the needs of pupils we will:

- Retain legal statementing for students with special needs.
- Work to address poor levels of literacy and numeracy.
- Invest additional funding for children on free school meals in order to tackle underachievement.
- Provide accessible, informed and independent careers advice.
- Implement an early intervention and prevention strategy to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training.
- Introduce age-appropriate sex and relationship education (SRE) in schools.

Housing

Alliance believes that a safe, warm and affordable home is an essential part of a decent quality of life. We have regularly emphasised the need to improve the quality of housing in Northern Ireland and to ensure that people are able to live free from sectarian intimidation.

In order to improve the quality of housing in Northern Ireland, we will:

- Invest in a Green New Deal 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 our Green New Deal by ensuring an effective fuel poverty strategy and improved efficiency targets for new builds.
- Support 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.
- Strengthen the Pre-Action Protocol for Mortgage Arrears proceedings to ensure all reasonable options to avoid possession are considered thoroughly and to better reflect the incidence of both negative equity and number of repossessions from people who are affected by negative equity in Northern Ireland.
- Ensure any proposed reforms to social housing provision do not jeopardise fairness, quality or diminish equality of access.
- 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.
- Propose that European funding be made available to develop new social housing, similar to a recent project in the Republic of Ireland.

We will also promote shared housing by tackling the division within our community. We will do so by:

- Commissioning a landmark Shared Housing Review of housing provision in Northern Ireland. This should be undertaken by a commission of experts and produce detailed recommendations by 2016.
- Setting and delivering a target through proactive and inter-departmental programmes, that by 2025 all evidence of threat, intimidation and exclusive claims to territorial monopoly by any group or cause will be eliminated in Northern Ireland.
- Robustly condemning attacks on the homes of people from religious or ethnic backgrounds or on the basis of sexuality. There must also be support for victims and active engagement with communities in order to improve levels of integration and cohesion.

Public 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. We will improve transport in Northern Ireland by:

- Gradually channelling public investment towards public (rather than private) 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.
- Promoting investment in cycling and walking paths through an Active Travel Bill. This would also cover the safety of paths and pavements.
- Instituting new rules on integrated transport and ensure access to sustainable transport is considered in major planning decisions.
- Advocate for the installation of both audio and visual announcements across all forms of public transport.

- Ensuring the full use of European funding to upgrade significant road and rail routes, including the Narrow Water Bridge.

Culture, Arts & Leisure

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 the arts and leisure has significant benefits for well-being and for our economy. Alliance supports investment in the arts and leisure at all levels and in order to achieve the full benefits of investment, we will:

- Ensure that investment is targeted at all parts of the local arts scene, so that we retain our world-class professional institutions but promote local arts events. We would also move towards longer-term funding arrangements such as three-year budgeting and endowments. We are particularly concerned that the arts in Northern Ireland have been the most poorly funded than any other part of these islands.
- Adopt a specific strategy to provide access to the arts to sections of the community who have lower-than-average uptake rates.
- Develop a formal protocol, in conjunction with the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, to ensure that sectarianism 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 products we have to offer, and how these can be developed, managed and projected to a wider audience.
- Promote a single Comprehensive Languages Bill to establish the need for service provision in both indigenous and minority languages, including sign language.
- Promote healthy living and physical activity across the 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.
- Promote grassroots sports by investing in appropriate facilities and supporting increased physical education at an early age in schools and setting targets for increased participation.
- Support bids for major sporting events to be held in Northern Ireland where a credible business case exists.

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 this year, are as effective as possible, Alliance will:

- Oversee the implementation of the remaining powers to be devolved as soon as possible.
- 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-2014local-government-manifesto.pdf>.

Sustainability and Environmental Matters

Climate Change

Alliance is a pro-environmental party. We believe that man-made climate change is real and has potentially disastrous consequences for human existence on earth. 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. Our approach to these issues needs to be three-fold. Firstly, we need to switch to less polluting forms of energy production. Secondly, we need to work to mitigate the impact of climate change. And thirdly, we need to ensure there is a legal framework that embeds environmentalism at the heart of government thinking.

Energy

Although many of the powers over energy development and procurement are devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive, renewable energy is a matter which needs to be championed by Northern Ireland's MPs. 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.

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

- The development of a Green New Deal to lever resources into improving energy efficiency, which must include a simple financing scheme for households.
- Building on the success of our Green New Deal by ensuring an effective fuel poverty strategy and improved efficiency targets for new builds.
- Reducing the legal requirements for micro-generation on homes.
- Investment 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. This research ought to reflect the diversity of the renewable energy sector.
- Establishing a body to assist with advice and funding support regarding small-scale community regeneration projects in Northern Ireland.
- A moratorium on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in Northern Ireland given our concerns about environmental and public safety concerns.
- The creation of a Green Business Development Strategy to ensure that the Northern Ireland economy benefits from these new technologies.

Mitigation

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 Treasury of addressing these and related problems.

Governments must recognise these changes are occurring and be sure that we account for them. In Westminster, Alliance will seek to:

- Urge the UK Government to access emergency EU funding to help with flooding problems.
- Establish robust evidence-gathering and reporting on the impact of climate change so that we have a full regard of the facts.

- 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.
- Abolish VAT on all renovations and repairs to existing buildings so that houses can be repaired and refurbished at a lower cost.
- Undertake complete audits of the existing UK flooding infrastructure to establish what areas need priority investment; either improving or constructing defences.

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.
- Imposing a duty on the various governments to reduce the carbon emissions from their own building stock and to produce ‘green buildings’ guidance for the public sector.

Agriculture, Animals and Nature

Agriculture & 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. It is important to remember that negotiations with the EU over the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are held by the UK Government. We will support agriculture and rural businesses by:

- Limiting 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.
- Directing greater resources to farmers who operate environmentally sustainable farming methods.
- Continuing to use resources to discourage over-farming of areas, especially upland areas.
- Promoting high standards of animal welfare.
- Discouraging land abandonment.

We will also campaign for the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that a small proportion of Northern Ireland’s Common Agriculture Policy 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.

As with agriculture, fishing is a major industry in many communities. We will re-invigorate the industry by reforming the Common Fisheries Policy to:

- Ensure the elimination of the wasteful practice of ‘discards’ which results in dead fish being put back into the sea.
- Support fishermen in moving to more sustainable methods of catching fish.
- Move from a top-down method of deciding fish quotas to one where 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.
- Provide investment and support to fishing communities, ensuring that skills and infrastructure are developed.

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 across Europe. Where appropriate this would include an all-island approach to wildlife management.
- Ensuring that governments fully implement and enforce 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;
- Supporting legislation to improve decision making around nature issues and to establish long-term targets and powers to meet them.

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. Naomi Long has received awards for her work on this and will continue to advocate for animal welfare in many different ways.

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.
- Opposing the badger cull on the grounds that it is both inhumane and ineffective; instead we would support further research into the causes of Bovine TB and how to tackle this.
- Oppose the live export of animals.

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

- A UK-wide ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.
- Opposition to any attempts to repeal the Hunting Act 2004 and supporting its extension to Northern Ireland.
- Increased powers for local authorities (including in Northern Ireland) 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.
- 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 owners of animals 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.

Step Forward in Europe

As a liberal internationalist party, Alliance remains 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, it also supports overcoming divisions between states, regions, nation and communities across Europe.

A Potential Referendum on EU Membership

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.

We do not support calls for an in/out referendum on membership because the uncertainty would make international businesses wary of investing in the EU and distract politicians at a time when constructive engagement with the EU is most essential. It will not help our own economic problems or the economic problems of our European trading partners if we distract ourselves with a divisive and costly referendum. As a result, we will:

- Oppose an in/out referendum on membership of the EU but hold a referendum on any further transfer of powers to the EU.
- Support continued membership of the EU, if a referendum occurs.

Northern Ireland in the European Union

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>.

We also advocate reforming the EU so that it operates efficiently and transparently. Key proposals would include:

- Publishing voting records, attendance records and expenses claims so that MEPs are held to account, just like every other politician.
- Ending the ridiculous situation where the European Parliament re-locates to Strasbourg every fourth week, costing £150 million each year and emitting over 19,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide.
- Enforcing the Memorandum of Understanding that exists between the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the other devolved governments so that when the UK government is involved in discussions on devolved areas, the relevant Northern Ireland Executive Minister is involved.
- Allowing the European Parliament to introduce legislation and to consistently reduce the number of secret votes taken in all of the EU institutions.
- Requiring the EU Commission to ensure the accounts are signed off every year and that erroneous spending is eliminated.
- Initiating a comprehensive review of the bureaucracy associated with EU funding with an aim to reduce its complexity.
- Improving public access to information about the EU through localised EU websites.



Foreign Affairs

Defence and the Armed Forces

Our armed services have undertaken an unprecedented level of overseas commitments. While acknowledging that there are limitations on what UK forces can achieve and the need for burden-sharing, it is likely that the UK will be asked to continue to deploy its service personnel overseas in peace-keeping and peace-making situations.

We believe that the circumstances of the global challenges that the UK faces have changed in the last several decades. For example, in the future our main sources of conflict are likely to be with rogue-states or non-state actors. Increasing levels of defence cooperation across Europe have also altered the foreign policy landscape.

Trident (the nuclear deterrent)

Alliance has seen no evidence to suggest that the like-for-like renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system is necessary or cost-effective. Alliance believes that other approaches can be found to ensure the security of the UK which reflect the security challenges of the future rather than of the Cold War. The UK can help combat nuclear proliferation by leading by example in reducing nuclear weapons as part of agreed multilateral efforts. Alliance opposes plans to replace the nuclear deterrent (Trident).

Conflict Resolution

War and global conflict have a disastrous effect on international relations, economic stability, the environment and public finances. Just as we have supported peace-building, reconciliation and democracy in Northern Ireland, we also support them in other areas of the world. Our approach to conflict resolution around the world is to seek to promote peace and human rights. As a result, Alliance supports:

- Military intervention only as a last resort – any military interventions must be legal, have defined aims and an exit strategy, assurances that the result will be sustainable and accompanied by non-military attempts at tackling the problem. We acknowledge the Responsibility to Protect doctrine and accept that this must be a factor in decision-making about intervention.
- Reforming global institutions to better promote globally agreed objectives and recognise the central role of the United Nations in maintaining global peace and security.
- Reviewing the criteria which decide to which countries UK arms companies can export.
- Offering to use the Northern Ireland model as a conflict resolution approach in countries where this would be appropriate.
- A two-state solution for Israel and Palestine based on existing UN Resolutions.

Support for The Armed Forces

Alliance respects the difficult work that the men and women in our armed forces undertake.

That is why we believe several changes need to be made to ensure that they are properly remunerated and rewarded for their efforts. This should include:

- An audit of the equipment provided to the armed forces to ensure that they are properly equipped for the various types of mission that they face. This audit should ensure appropriate equipment for newer types of deployment such as counter-insurgency and peace-keeping.

- Supporting the full implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland including regular monitoring of the scheme and individual Executive Departments reporting to the UK Government.

Promoting our Values Abroad

Whilst we acknowledge that there are significant economic and social problems in Northern Ireland, we also realise that there are many people across the world who suffer from economic difficulties, environmental challenges and social, cultural, religious and political oppression. As a society which is in a position to promote prosperity, sustainability and human rights abroad, we should have a strong and active policy of helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

International Development and Global Prosperity

Alliance believes that richer countries have a moral obligation to, as well as a strategic interest in, international development spending. As a consequence, Alliance will:

- Tackle international tax-dodging which harms the economies of both the UK and the developing world. We will ensure that the UK's tax rules do not have a negative effect on developing countries.
- Assist developing countries to strengthen their own tax collection systems.
- Support the creation of a register requiring the publication of company ownership information in the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This would ensure financial transparency and reduce the use of tax havens.
- Assist developing countries to move 'from aid to trade'. This assistance would include; improving access to international markets, supporting the development of smallholder farms and small business as well as expanding Fair Trade initiatives.
- Support greater investment in water and sanitation supplies as a matter of priority. This not only reduces disease and improves sanitation but could have helped prevent the development of diseases with a global threat as well as impacting directly on economic growth and inclusion.
- Develop the 'polluter pays' principle further so that the burden of dealing with pollution is carried by those who are responsible for creating it.
- Support a global climate change fund to help ensure that poorer countries can mitigate the impact of climate change. Climate change is disproportionately caused by industrialised nations so we should assist other nations to adapt to it. This agenda needs to have accountable implementation and be supported by a global agreement on climate change.
- Support delivery of the post-2015 Development Programme, the successor to the Millennium Development Goals. We recognise the role the UK has played in the Millennium Development agenda but regret that a number of targets have not been met. The post-2015 targets must be both achievable and ambitious. These goals should include; specific targets for women including eradicating gendered violence and promoting access to both education and decision-making, tackling in-country inequality and invest in programmes that improve maternal health and the reduce of child mortality.



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 opposing 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 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 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.

Step For
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Step Forward

Not Back



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