



Conservatives

Time for a Real Fresh Start



**THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY MANIFESTO
STORMONT ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2017**

Foreword

Peace is built upon small steps of trust and reconciliation. Our political process in Northern Ireland has been an example to a divided world. However, it is beginning to dim: it is increasingly besieged by sectarian tensions, bruised by incompetence and mired in corruption allegations. It was inevitable that the final act of this spectacle would be the collapse of the institution itself. This happened much sooner than many had anticipated - months only after the last Stormont Assembly election.

Therefore, we ask that you use your vote in this election to reject the politics of sectarianism and embrace the politics of the United Kingdom. The Northern Ireland Conservatives are a fresh pro-Union centre-right party. It is proudly and distinctively Northern Irish, but at the same time remains a full part of the UK Conservative Party. It is our intention to remove the sectarian blinkers from Stormont policy, enabling our region to tap into the full potential that Northern Ireland can offer.

It is time to iron out the creases of our institutional framework by placing the electorate at the heart of Government. It is time for the Government in Northern Ireland to be an advocate of policy, built on accountability. Members of the Government cannot be above the appeals of the people. For without the trust of voters, politicians are representatives of nothing.

If elected as your assembly members, we will ensure that your money is invested in the optimal way to benefit our society. The Conservative Party will invest in projects to safeguard our future. We will end wasteful duplication in education, build an efficient NHS, urgently improve infrastructure and promote business friendly policies.

The Northern Ireland Conservatives believe it is time to take an overdue step forward in the process to normal governance. It is our intention to make policy the basis of any programme for government. It is imperative that we protect our future. Let us cultivate a Northern Ireland which shines as a beacon of hope throughout global uncertainty.

On March 2nd: Don't hope for change, vote for change. For good governance, vote for the Party of Government.

This document includes our manifesto for the Assembly election in Northern Ireland. Naturally, its content is identical to what we set out in the recent Stormont election a few months ago. The UK Conservative Government has already delivered on some of the promises made. However, we need your vote to become a new voice in Stormont championing the rest of our policies in Northern Ireland.

Alan Dunlop

Chair of the Northern Ireland Conservatives

The Conservatives are a fresh, pro-Union, centre-right party, which is proudly and distinctively Northern Irish, but remains a full part of the UK Conservative Party. Here are just a few of the things that we stand for, across the policy areas devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Making Stormont Work



The political norm of Stormont has for too long been reliance upon a position in Government. Those who should have taken up the mantle of Opposition to a failing Stormont argue that the structures aren't in place or that they can at least make one Department work.

The Conservative Party disagrees.

We want the people of Northern Ireland to be able to hold its Executive to account. We've welcomed the limited measures introduced under John McCallister's Opposition Act, but believe it requires more radical reform. The Conservative Party will support all measures to strengthen the Opposition, whilst ensuring elected representatives hold the Executive to account. We will not make excuses to avoid performing our democratic duty.

The Petition of Concern

The Petition of Concern is abused by the political parties in Stormont, enabling them to overrule democratic decisions which do not discriminate against either community.

Whilst the Conservative Party does not support the removal of the mechanism, which is vital for ensuring stability within Stormont, it does believe it requires reform to work effectively.

When a Petition of Concern is lodged by the Assembly, it should be reviewed by an independent body to determine whether the bills falls within the remit originally intended for the mechanism. If the independent body believes that the Petition of Concern has been abused, the block will fall and the legislation shall move onto the next stage.

The abuse of a mechanism designed to protect communities indicates a lack of respect for the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland. The Conservative Party pledge to work tirelessly to ensure this is not possible within the coming Assembly.

Justice – keeping Northern Ireland safe

The Northern Ireland Conservatives are strong supporters of the police and prison services. We'll never be half-hearted when it comes to defending the rule of law. In Stormont the party would champion prison and probation services which manage offenders properly and provide them with the best possible chance to be rehabilitated.

Life means life. The Conservative party believes automatic full life sentences are required for those convicted of killing a police or prison officer. We will make no apology for this.

Defend Free Speech. The Conservative Party believe one of the core principles of the United Kingdom to be the right to free speech. We will therefore lobby to reform defamation law in Northern Ireland to bring it into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Crackdown on Extortion. The Conservative Party believe that extortion should be treated as seriously as rape and murder in the eyes of the law. We intend to send a message that there is no place in Northern Ireland for such activity.

A shared future is a prosperous future

The divisions within society which are stirred up by Stormont cost the taxpayer on a daily basis. The Conservative Party stands for hard working families, who do nothing to create tension within their communities. We want to deliver a harmonious future, tackle sectarianism and deal with Northern Ireland's troubled past.

A record of delivery Security and opportunity for all

- We are modern, compassionate, one nation Conservatives. We are delivering on our commitments, providing security for working people, and extending opportunity to everyone.
- That's why we will finish our long-term economic plan, so we provide security for working people at every stage of their lives. Our first duty is to keep our country safe and secure, so we will do whatever is necessary. But we are also focused on helping those with the least, so we build a society with real opportunity at its heart.
- Other political parties are becoming more extreme, self-absorbed and are in disarray. We are getting things done on the common ground of politics – delivering

The Party intends to:

- Support the rule of law as the bedrock of policy towards parades
- Require the Union Flag to be flown on designated days on Government buildings and council headquarters, in line with the rest of the United Kingdom
- Actively combat division in housing and education
- Encourage dialogue between communities around peace walls with the aim of bringing them down
- Ensure 'truth and reconciliation centre' reflects the full account of the Troubles
- Draft a 'statement of wrongs' on the past, which places blame for the Troubles on all groups and individuals who have acted outside of the law

security and opportunity for all the people of the UK.

Delivering on our commitments

At the 2015 General Election, we made clear commitments to the people of the UK to give people security and opportunity, at every stage of their life, and we have an important responsibility to deliver on them.

This April, the tax cuts we pledged will start to come into effect, the new National Living Wage will help reward work, and the elderly will get the biggest increase in the state pension for over a decade. And by following our long-term economic plan, we've got 2.2 million more people in work since 2010. But there is still much more to do. So we will continue working hard to deliver our commitments.

Economic security

The past five years have been about delivering security for working people. By taking difficult decisions to reduce the deficit and create jobs, together with the hard work of the everyone in the UK, we are building a stronger economy. Over the next five years, we will work through our long-term economic plan to continue the job of securing our economic future.

Holding a referendum on our EU membership

We fought hard to fix the aspects of our EU membership that cause so much frustration – to get a better deal for our country and secure our future. It was a difficult negotiation with 27 other countries. But throughout we were driven by one consideration – what is best for Britain’s economic and national security. In the end, the British people will decide whether we are stronger and better off with our European neighbours as part of the European Union, or on our own. That’s because we made a promise and kept it – to deliver an in-out referendum.

Delivering our manifesto

- At the heart of everything we do is our long-term economic plan, and over the last year we grew faster than any other G7 country.
- This year the deficit is set to fall to almost a third of the level we inherited, helping secure our economy for the long term.
- Our commitment not to raise VAT, National Insurance or income tax for the next five years is now law, and this April the tax cuts we pledged will start to come into effect.

- From April, the new National Living Wage will reward work and mean that no-one aged 25 or over will earn less than £7.20 an hour.

- Our ‘triple lock’ means that in April the Basic State Pension will increase to £119.30 a week, the biggest real-terms rise in 15 years.

- To help keep our country secure, we have committed to the NATO two per cent defence spending target with a rising defence budget, as well as protecting spending on the police and counter-terrorism.

- We are standing up for the world’s poorest by meeting our commitment on development spending.

NORTHERN IRELAND needs the Conservatives

The economy – the tools to succeed

Enterprise and entrepreneurship are the engines of a successful economy. In the aspiration of building a flourishing private sector, and reducing dependency upon the state, the people of Northern Ireland need only be provided with the tools to succeed. Our emphasis is on creating jobs, jobs and more jobs. Prosperity for all is at the heart of what we do. We welcome the specific economic measures for Northern Ireland pushed forward by the Prime Minister and we’re committed to cutting waste in the Executive.

Some key points:

- We would lower Corporation Tax to 10% to attract inward investment and jobs
- We would abolish air passenger duty for short haul flights from Northern Ireland
- We would create enterprise zones, which

offer incentives to export, 'Research and Development' help and rates relief

- We would reform the public sector, using competition to provide better services for the best value for money- The department for the economy, once established, should not just act as a name change for DETI, but should merge the relevant parts of DETI, DFP and DEL

- We would promote the teaching of STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths), at the centre of our education strategy, giving our young people the tools to succeed and industry the skills it needs

Energy

We need to explore every avenue to cut energy costs for businesses. The all island energy market has yet to deliver for businesses or householders in NI. We need to integrate our energy grids with the GB and beyond as rapidly as possible if we are to force down prices.

The failure of the NI Executive to facilitate the proposed new north – south interconnector is yet another example of Stormont talking but not delivering.

We need to abandon the unrealistic target of generating 40% of our electricity through renewable sources, by 2020. The Executive should commission expert advice now, in order to develop a more achievable target. In Northern Ireland, there are serious doubts about relying upon wind power to hit renewable energy targets. Hydro-electricity, tidal energy, anaerobic digestion and geo-thermal should be included in the renewable mix. The Executive must develop a strategy to tackle energy costs and focus on reducing the margins paid to generators and surcharges payable for security of supply rather than focusing only on changing

the means of supply and increasing the percentage of renewable energy sources.

Education – sharing a variety of pathways to success

Segregating children as young as 5 years old, by virtue of their religion or political background, damages society. We support initiatives which encourage greater sharing and integration in our schools. We also recognise that some schools will concentrate on academic curricula, while some will have a vocational emphasis. We want to fix what is broken, but certainly not penalise schools which are providing a first class education. We want a further and higher education system that is on a par with anything else on offer in these islands – we don't want a second rate insular system which may be what we end up with if the current parties remain in office.

Some key points:

- Support measures to get our children learning together. Encourage schools to reflect the composition of the communities in which they work.

- Deliver high quality vocational education and better provision for children with 'special needs'.

- Review the plans for ESA to deliver a cost-effective body which works for all schools, rather than against grammar schools and the integrated sector.

- Gear the education system to help the economy grow and tackle educational underachievement in schools which fail their pupils.

- Investing in higher and further education so that we have institutions that are on a par with the rest of the UK and we are producing the well qualified staff companies require.

We aim to:

1. Raise educational standards, so that all learners achieve their potential, and we eliminate the long tail of underachievement.
2. Place a renewed focus on eliminating literacy and numeracy underachievement at primary school level so that fewer young people enter secondary school already disadvantaged.
3. Work towards a confident, integrated system of education built on the values of sharing and collaboration, where children of different backgrounds are educated together – as endorsed by the Good Friday Agreement. The Government should provide financial incentives to transform existing schools into integrated schools and aim to have full integration in place by 2025. For the avoidance of doubt this means one system of schooling in which any religious instruction is provided outside of the statutory school day.



4. Introduce a single, non-denominational system of initial teacher education as a



matter of priority, which would result in world-class educational benefits and reduce waste.

5. Adopt what is best in national policies in relation to changes in GCSE and A' Level, and adapt as appropriate to Northern Ireland, whilst ensuring students aren't disadvantaged when applying to mainland Universities.
6. Require DE and DEL to articulate an agreed 14-19 education policy which would re-align and improve the interface of post-primary and further/higher education.
7. Promote a labour force with the relevant mix of graduate and non-graduate qualifications to compete in a global environment, and to work towards increasing the number of young people studying STEM subjects and computer coding (programming) subjects.

8. Urgently take measures to re-engage young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEETs) as confident and fulfilled members of the workforce.

9. Invest in careers education in schools, and in further and higher education including more meaningful partnerships with industry, accompanied by qualifications and professional development opportunities for careers teachers.



10. Implement Option 3 of Stephen Farry's recent paper "*Securing a Sustainable Solution for Higher Education in Northern Ireland*". This would see Executive spending increase by £30m a year and require fees to rise to £6,000 per year.

Health – flexible and patient focussed

The NHS is rightly regarded as one of the UK's crowning achievements and a first-class health service must always remain one of the central priorities of government

in Northern Ireland. We want to see an efficient, patient-focussed NHS, which delivers real improvements to health and remains free at the point of use.

Since 2010, due to the ring fencing of health spending nationally and the more generous treatment of Northern Ireland by Conservatives in Westminster there has been no cut in cash terms and only a modest reduction in real terms in the level of funding of the health service in NI. Sadly the problems we see in health are largely the fault of the mismanagement of the NI Executive.

Nationally we will increase funding for the NHS by £10 billion a year by 2020, of which £6 billion will be delivered by the end of 2016-17. The NHS budget will rise from £101 billion today to £120 billion by 2020-21 (*HM Treasury, Spending Review and Autumn Statement, 25 November 2015*).

This means that the NI Executive knows it will get a 'consequential' increase in funding. The Executive needs to make the tough decisions and ensure this money is well spent.

Some key points:

- We believe that the NHS should remain free to all at the point of use, and this extends to an opposition to the introduction of prescription charges in the NHS in Northern Ireland.

- We believe that access to medicines to be as an important principle as making them cost free. Currently patients in NI do not get access to new medicines as quickly as elsewhere in the UK. We believe that all new NICE approved medicines should be available within 3 months of NICE approval – as is the case in England and Wales.

- We believe that the Donaldson Report should be accepted in full by the Executive, including the first recommendation that the political parties should accept, in advance, recommendations of an international panel of experts to assess which hospitals should deliver the highest quality, and safest, acute care that 21st Century medicine can offer. The NHS should not be used as a political football.

- We believe that services in Northern Ireland should be regionalised under a single umbrella Trust, rather than the six that currently exist to deliver health and social care in Northern Ireland and that as a result of this services should be regionalised and centres of excellence for different specialities located at different hospitals throughout the province.

- We believe that the time has come for the 'Transforming Your Care' agenda to become more than just words and that it is well past time that care is delivered away from hospitals, and nearer to people's homes.

- We believe that there is an untapped role in community pharmacists to deliver care to patients within the community, as an alternative to general practice. We believe that this potential should be unlocked through empowering community pharmacists through the commissioning of services from them.

Social development, culture, arts and leisure – standing up for working people and combating dependency

We want to combat a benefits culture which is unfair to hard-working people and perpetuates poverty. We support the principle that it should never pay more to remain on benefits than to work.



We believe that sport and culture play a vital role in a happy society. We want to see a multitude of cultures in this part of the United Kingdom encouraged and enjoyed in an atmosphere of tolerance, generosity and respect.

Some key points:

- Demand housing associations provide a better mix of social homes in the right quantity.

- Implement the Government's welfare reforms as agreed within the 'Fresh Start' Deal.



- Increase PE in primary schools. We believe we should aim to ensure that all primary school children receive 2 hours of PE every week. Currently our provision is the worst in the UK. We would 'ring-fence' NI's share of the Sugar Tax to pay for this.

- Devise a sporting anthem for Northern Ireland, to complement the National Anthem.

Environment and regional development – a healthy environment and better local government

Conservatives stand for effective, value for money local government and we're open to changing the way services like public transport and water are provided. We believe that the people of Northern Ireland deserve the very best, at the best possible price and we want to protect our beautiful surroundings.

Some key points:

- Support hydraulic fracturing as long as environmental law is strictly implemented.
- Encourage competition in our transport system.
- Create a flexible planning system focused on helping to create jobs.



Some key points:

- Automatic life sentences, where life means life, for those convicted of killing a police officer or prison officer who is carrying out their duties.
- Look at paying for probation services by results.
- Defend free speech by changing our defamation law in line with the rest of the UK.

Agriculture and fisheries – protecting rural communities and prioritising our food industry

The Conservatives will help protect rural communities and support farmers and fishermen, enabling them to sustain Northern Ireland's abundant natural resources. We realise how critical the agri-food sector, in all of its stages, is to our economy. Food is something we do well in Northern Ireland and the industry deserves to be backed properly.



Some key points:

- Maintain the EU's single farm payment.
- Create a new logo to make food from Northern Ireland instantly recognisable and concentrate on adding value to food products.
- Work with the fishing industry to create marine protection areas which will take

their interests into account.

Integration and the past – a shared future is a prosperous future

Not only is division bad for communities, it costs taxpayers huge amounts of money. We stand for people throughout Northern Ireland who do nothing to create divided communities, but are paying the price, each and every day. As a society we need to say, no more. The cost is too high and we will no longer pay to sustain division. Social stability and a successful economy are closely linked. We want to deliver a harmonious future, tackle sectarianism and deal with Northern Ireland's troubled past.

Key Costed policies

CREATING JOBS – CUTTING CORPORATION TAX

We would cut Corporation Tax Cut to 10% by 2018. We would pay for this through the introduction of Welfare Reform. We are the only party to identify how we would pay for this policy. The NI Executive has a one year budget that contains some spending commitments e.g. on roads but no detail on how the cut would be paid for. None of the five Executive parties have detailed how they would pay for this policy.

In addition we would to commit to ‘track’ any further cuts in UK Corporation Tax i.e. if the UK rate is cut to 16% we would cut the NI rate to 9%.

IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY - ABOLISH AIR PASSENGER DUTY

Northern Ireland is on the periphery of Europe and faces considerable physical barriers to access. Air Passenger Duty is a serious constraint on efforts to increase exports of goods and services and to our ambitions to grow our tourism economy.

With the Republic (with no APD) and Scotland (where cuts in APD and eventual abolition have been suggested) in close proximity radical action is required to bolster the airline and airport economy in NI. A £4 million fund has been suggested but is totally inadequate. It is mere gesture politics from an Executive that talks of re-balancing the economy but fails to take radical action.

We would abolish Air Passsenger Duty at an estimated cost of £60 million per annum. We would use the funds freed up from NI Water to cover this cost.

PUMP PRIMING OFFICE DEVELOPMENT - LOCATIONS FOR JOBS

We would introduce short term rate relief for those constructing A class offices or upgrading office space to A grade. We need developers to build premises to host the companies we wish to attract. We would exempt newly finished offices from business rates until they are fully occupied.

We would pay for this policy by bringing the treatment of charity shops into line with practice in GB – they would qualify for an 80% exemption rather than 100%. We would lift the current cap on domestic rates. This would generate a fund of over £5m a year which would be used to fund the relief on office developments.

Boosting the provision of A class office space is central to attracting Foreign Direct Investment and high-paying jobs.

GETTING THE SKILLS FOR THE JOBS

We would increase higher education fees to £6,000 per annum – in line with Stephen Farry’s Option Three. The additional £30m cost of Option Three would be met from part of the £300m ‘freed up’ mutualising NI Water.

The other parties are largely committed to a policy that is undermining further and higher education in NI. We need to be increasing student numbers not cutting them.

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE

We would mutualise NI Water and introduce an itemised rates bill that clearly states the current contribution ratepayers make to NI Water. We would increase this, in stages, by approximately £100 on average per household. This would enable the new mutualised NI Water to raise money on the

capital markets.

This would:

- Enable NI Water to invest in infrastructure and upgrade our systems to enable us to avoid huge fines from the EU.
- It would meet the EU requirement for a distinct billing process for water services.
- It would create hundreds of jobs in construction.
- It would free up £300 million of public expenditure to be redeployed elsewhere.

FAST TRACKING THE RIGHT ROADS

The mutualisation of NI Water would free up £300 million to be spent elsewhere. Our plans for students and the plan to abolish APD would cost up to £100 million. This leaves £200 million from the existing budgets to be redeployed.

We would prioritise the building of roads that would reduce congestion and aid the economy.

Specifically we would:

- Build the M2/M3/Westlink/York Road Junction upgrade. This junction is a key bottle-neck right next to our main harbour. The current Executive is making noises about building this but is has not committed any funding to the project. This would cost £115 million.
- We would fast-track the project to widen the Sydenham Bypass at a cost of £45 million. Again there are currently no plans by the current Executive to fund this vital project.

We would also prioritise the construction of a new road to link the A1 and M1 and the site of the former Maze prison. This would

relieve congestion at Blaris-Sprucefield and open up not just the Maze site but West Lisburn industrial estates. This would cost approximately £100 million. We would pay for this by halving the current £230 million the Executive plans to spend on the A5 in the next four years. Removing the congestion on the main road between Belfast and Dublin is a greater priority than the A5.

MAKING OUR PEOPLE MORE HEALTHY Increasing physical activity in Northern Ireland primary schools

One in four children in NI are now obese or overweight. Obesity and overweight are estimated to cost the NI economy and health service £370 million. The annual cost to the health service alone is calculated to be £92 million.

The School of Education and the School of Sport at the Ulster University have drafted a policy aimed at ensuring all primary schools offer two hours of PE per week. This policy is costed at about £1 million per year for three years and has a goal of ensuring that by 2021 70% of primary schools will provide at least 2 hours high quality PE each week.

NI's consequential 'share' of the Sugar Tax could amount to £18 million per year. As in England we believe all of this funding should be ring fenced for school sports and health prevention and promotion work in schools.

We would devote £3 million per year for five years to the campaign to get our children more active. We would aim to ensure that 100% of primary schools provide at least two hours of high quality PE each week by the end of the next Assembly.

Appendix 1

General Economic Brief

- When we came into government the country was borrowing over £150 billion a year and unemployment had increased by nearly half a million. Britain had suffered the deepest recession since the war and had the second biggest structural deficit of any advanced economy.
- We had to make realistic assessments about the state of the British economy and this involved taking difficult decisions to reduce the deficit and control spending. Thanks to the hard work of the British people, this long-term economic plan is working. The deficit is down by more than half, there are 2.8 million more private sector jobs and there are over 900,000 more businesses.
- But the job isn't done: there is more to do and there are risks in the global economy threatening this country. That's why we are sticking to the long-term economic plan that has got us this far, so we deliver 2 million more jobs, 3 million more apprenticeships and lower taxes for hardworking people – and secure a better future for the UK.

Key economic statistics:

- GDP growth: 0.5 per cent in Q4 2015. Growth in Q3 2015 was 0.4 per cent.
- Borrowing: £7.1 billion in February 2016. This was a £500 million improvement on February 2015.
- CPI inflation: 0.3 per cent in February 2016. CPI inflation in January 2016 was 0.3 per cent.
- Employment up 521,000 on the year. There are now 31.4 million people in work.
- Unemployment down 172,000 on

the year. There are 1.57 million claiming jobseekers allowance.

Key economic story

The UK economy is stronger because we confronted our country's problems and took the difficult decisions, but we now face the challenge of a dangerous cocktail of global risks. The UK is well prepared to handle this challenge, but only if we act now so we don't pay later.

We can choose to add to the risk and uncertainty or we be a force for stability. We can choose short term fixes and more stimulus, or we can lead the world with long-term solutions to long-term problems. Sound public finances to deliver security, lower taxes on business and enterprise to create jobs, reform to improve schools, investment to build homes and infrastructure, and help for working people with lower taxes and support for saving.

That is the path we followed over the past five years and it's given us one of the strongest economies in the world. It is the path we will follow in the years ahead. In this Budget we redouble our efforts to make the whole UK fit for the future.

Recent economic events

- Employment remains at a record high as wage growth continues to outstrip inflation. There were 31.4 million in work across the UK – a record high – in January 2016, while unemployment was at 5.1 per cent, the lowest level for a decade. Total pay rose 2.1 per cent while inflation was close to flat over the same period (*ONS, Labour Market Statistics, 16 March 2016, link*).
- 31 million people to receive an income tax cut. From April 2017, the tax

free personal allowance will rise to £11,500, a tax cut for 31 million people that means a typical basic rate taxpayer will be paying over £1,000 less income tax than in 2010. The higher rate threshold will also increase to £45,000, a tax cut of over £400 to middle Britain (*HMT, Budget 2016, 16 March 2016, link*).

- No more National Insurance Contributions for the self-employed. We're abolishing Class 2 National Insurance Contributions for the self-employed, providing an £130 tax cut for Britain's 3 million strong army of the self-employed (*HMT, Budget 2016, 16 March 2016, link*).

- Freezing fuel duty to help household budgets and support small firms. We have frozen fuel duty for the sixth year in a row, a saving of £75 a year to the average driver and £270 a year to a small business with a van. We're also freezing beer and cider duty to back British pubs (*HMT, Budget 2016, 16 March 2016, Link*).



**Conservative Values
Safe In Her Hands**

**Promoted by Alan Dunlop on behalf of Northern Ireland Conservatives,
both of 60 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7ET.**