

**The Northern Ireland
Conservative and Unionist Party
Manifesto 2024**

CLEAR PLAN
BOLD ACTION
SECURE FUTURE



**Northern Ireland
Conservatives**



Contents

› Foreword	2
› Bold actions to deliver a secure future for Northern Ireland.....	3
› The Party of the Union	4
› Maintaining political stability	5
› Safeguarding the Union	6
› Strengthening Northern Ireland’s economy	8
› A shared society	9
› Addressing the legacy of the Troubles.....	10
› Protecting Northern Ireland’s security.....	12

» Foreword

We are restoring the UK's economic stability after Covid and Ukraine. Inflation is down, real wages are up, growth has returned – and we are cutting taxes to give working people financial security. This did not happen by accident. The economy is turning a corner because we built strong economic foundations before the pandemic and we have stuck to our plan.

Recent years have also seen seismic and positive progress in Northern Ireland, with the Windsor Framework Agreement reached in February 2023 and the power-sharing Executive restored in February 2024. As the Conservative and Unionist Party, we will always support Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom and the agreements and institutions which are the foundation of the more peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland we see today. Our plan to support communities and the economy across the UK will continue to benefit Northern Ireland.

We must stick to this plan and take bold action to secure the future of our nation and society. In the next decade, we'll face challenges to our energy and national security from foreign conflicts; to our borders from uncontrolled and illegal migration; to our economy from global shocks and to our society from those seeking to divide and disempower communities. Dealing with these challenges requires a clear plan and bold action.

We have that plan and the courage to take the bold steps necessary to build a secure future for you and your family.

A future where hard work and doing the right thing is always rewarded, not punished with higher taxes.

A future where aspiration and opportunity are celebrated and young people always get the skills they need to succeed.



The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak
Prime Minister and Leader
of the Conservative and Unionist Party

A future where public services, like the NHS, serve citizens not vested interests, and every citizen upholds British values of decency, democracy and service.

A future, where national, border, energy and food security are put first, not taken for granted, and immigration is never allowed to run out of control.

A future where family is always supported and communities decide their own priorities, rather than having them imposed from above.

A future where we can have pride – in ourselves, in our communities and in our country.

There is only one way to secure that future – and that is to vote Conservative on 4 July.

We must stick with the plan – a plan that has given four million more people the security and purpose of a job, cut taxes for 29 million working people, protected pensioners with the Triple Lock, delivered the largest sustained increase in defence spending since the end of the Cold War and got Brexit done.

The alternative is we go back to square one. To a fragile economy under Labour driven by unfunded spending, higher taxes on working families and debt piling up for future generations to pay off. Labour would sacrifice Northern Ireland's interests in pursuit of a closer relationship with the EU and reverse progress to provide answers for those impacted by the Troubles.

On 4 July, choose lower immigration, lower taxes and protected pensions. Choose a secure future with the Conservatives.



The Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Bold actions to deliver a secure future for Northern Ireland

Our record delivering for Northern Ireland

- » Delivering **£1 billion** of levelling up funding for communities in Northern Ireland
- » Providing **nearly £10 billion** of support for Northern Ireland during the Covid pandemic
- » Agreeing the **Windsor Framework** to protect Northern Ireland's place in the Union
- » Reinstating the devolved power-sharing institutions to **restore local democracy**
- » Passing the **Legacy Act** to deliver better outcomes for those most affected by the Troubles
- » Hosting a global **Investment Summit** to showcase Northern Ireland's potential
- » Celebrating the **25th anniversary** of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement

Our plan for Northern Ireland

- » Deliver **£3.3 billion** of extra funding to stabilise public services
- » Agree a **new fiscal framework** to reflect the different level of need in Northern Ireland
- » Continue to **invest directly in local areas** across Northern Ireland
- » Implement all commitments in the **Strengthening the Union Command Paper**
- » Support the **Independent Commission for Reconciliation & Information Recovery** to provide answers for victims and survivors
- » Back **Northern Ireland's economy** to succeed
- » Continue to **uphold all three strands** of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement

» The Party of the Union

As Conservatives and Unionists we are the party for the whole of the United Kingdom. It follows without equivocation that we want Northern Ireland to remain a full and integral part of our great Union. For Conservatives, the best and strongest future for Northern Ireland will always be as part of a strong and thriving United Kingdom. We will never be neutral when it comes to expressing our support for the Union and Northern Ireland's place within it. Our Unionism is built on the enduring belief that all four parts of the United Kingdom truly are better together.

At the same time, we recognise that there are many people who live in Northern Ireland who take a different view and support parties committed to a united Ireland, in which Northern Ireland is no longer a part of the UK. We have always been clear that this is a perfectly legitimate aspiration, albeit one that we do not share, so long as it is pursued by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. As Conservatives we will always honour our commitments to govern fairly and in the interests of the entire community in Northern Ireland.

Under the terms of the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the Secretary of State is obliged to hold a border poll, should he or she be of the view at any point that there is within Northern Ireland a majority in favour of a united Ireland. Conservatives do not believe that there is any reliable basis that this is the case now or is likely to be for the foreseeable future. The circumstances requiring a border poll are not, therefore, in our view satisfied and discussion of such a poll is an irrelevant distraction from the real business of supporting Northern Ireland to succeed.

Our vision for Northern Ireland is one where politics works, the economy grows and society is stronger and more united. We want to see a place where everybody has the same opportunities for themselves and their families, irrespective of where they have come from, their community background or ultimate political aspiration. Of course, Northern Ireland benefits massively from being part of the Union – for example being part of the world's sixth largest economy, shared institutions like the National Health Service and the fact that the United Kingdom is a major global power. The rest of the United Kingdom also benefits enormously from the contribution that Northern Ireland makes to it. Our Union has always been a partnership greater than the sum of its parts.

Northern Ireland is at its best when it is welcoming, inclusive and at the same time outward looking. We want to see a Northern Ireland that thrives as part of our United Kingdom and can stand with the best on the global stage, whether that is exporting world leading brands or competing for investment and jobs. In the last Parliament, we took pride in marking the centenary of Northern Ireland. In our view, it is continuing to support Northern Ireland to thrive that will enable us to look ahead with confidence to the next century with the surest foundation for the future success of our Union.

» Maintaining political stability

Conservatives remain committed to an inclusive, devolved government in Northern Ireland in which politicians from all parts of the community can work together for the common good. In our view this is the best and most appropriate form of government for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is governed most effectively when governed locally, rather than by Ministers in Westminster. We firmly reject direct rule as an acceptable alternative to devolution.

At the beginning of the last Parliament, as a result of the actions of Sinn Fein, the political institutions established by the 1998 Agreement had not been functioning properly for nearly three years. There was no Executive or Assembly and, as a result, other bodies, such as the North-South Ministerial Council, could not operate as intended. In January 2020, the UK Government managed to secure the New Decade, New Approach agreement, working with the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government. This led directly to the re-establishment of the Executive and the return of the Assembly.

The New Decade, New Approach agreement contained a wide range of commitments for the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, in accordance with their respective responsibilities. These ranged from finance, issues around culture, language and identity, and measures to place the political institutions on a more sustainable footing. For our part, the UK Government set about faithfully implementing its obligations, such as the Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern Act 2022 and, in the absence of action by the Executive, the Identity and Language Act 2022.

In February 2022, however, the institutions once again collapsed, this time as a consequence of the actions of the Democratic Unionist Party in opposition to the old Northern Ireland Protocol. As a result, a number of pieces of legislation, including budgets, had to be passed by the UK Government at Westminster to enable civil servants in Northern Ireland to maintain public services, while at the same time seeking to establish a basis on which the devolved institutions could be restored.

This finally occurred some three years later, in February 2024, largely as a result of changes to the operation of the old Protocol contained in the 2023 Windsor Framework and the 2024 Safeguarding the Union Command Paper. It is our fervent hope that the successful restoration of the institutions can herald a new era of political stability in Northern Ireland and of co-operation between the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. The Conservatives will always work tirelessly towards that end. Any discussion of reforms, including on the subject of timing, should be carefully considered in this context, and should command widespread support across the community in Northern Ireland. The Belfast Agreement has been vital in enabling progress and peace, but it is also important that it continues to be a living document that always serves the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Conservative approach to political stability in Northern Ireland is based on our unequivocal and unwavering support for the historic 1998 Belfast Agreement, the twenty-fifth anniversary of which we marked with events throughout 2023. For us, that Agreement – which built on earlier Conservative initiatives such as the 1993 Downing Street Declaration – has been the bedrock of the peace and progress that Northern Ireland has seen over the past

twenty-six years. A Conservative Government will always stand by the Agreement, along with its successors, and seek to ensure that it is fully implemented and operational.

At the heart of the 1998 Agreement is the so-called principle of consent, itself based on the Downing Street Declaration. This states that there can be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent, freely and legitimately given, of the people who live there. This principle is inviolable and will always be upheld by a Conservative Government.

The Agreement itself covers the three key sets of relationships through three strands that are interlocking and interdependent: within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and Ireland; and between the United Kingdom and Ireland. A Conservative Government will always fully respect the long-established three-stranded approach to Northern Ireland affairs – including the principle that the internal affairs of Northern Ireland are matters for the Northern Ireland parties and the UK Government to determine.

We maintain a unique relationship with Ireland, a country with which we share so much history, along with strong economic, social, cultural and family ties and a land border. Successive Irish Governments have been much valued partners in helping to secure progress and stability in Northern Ireland. While there were clearly differences of opinion following the UK's decision to leave the European Union, these did not alter the enduring strength of relations between our two countries and the Irish Government welcomed the Windsor Framework in 2023 and the restoration of the devolved institutions this February. A Conservative Government will continue to work closely with the Irish Government to strengthen further our bilateral relationship and co-operate through the institutions established under strand three of the Belfast Agreement – the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council.

Safeguarding the Union

Following the partial introduction of the Northern Ireland Protocol in 2021, the flaws inherent in it quickly became apparent. Even when not fully implemented and with a series of grace periods, the Protocol was placing significant additional burdens on businesses moving goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and vice versa. It was disadvantaging consumers in Northern Ireland who no longer had access to the full range of products as before. It was leading to diversion of trade, with a number of businesses from Great Britain opting no longer to supply the Northern Ireland market and Northern Ireland businesses struggling to source goods from elsewhere. There was a democratic deficit, with Northern Ireland subject to new EU laws over which Stormont had no say. It was quickly clear that full implementation of the Protocol would have been unworkable.

Moreover, all of this was leading to renewed political instability in Northern Ireland with the unintended consequence that a Protocol initially designed to uphold the Belfast Agreement now risked significantly undermining it. This was evident when in February 2022, the Democratic Unionist Party pulled out of the Executive, leaving Northern Ireland without a functioning devolved administration for the second time in just over a year. Clearly, significant issues needed to be addressed with wholesale changes to the Protocol required.

As a result, the UK Government embarked on an intensive process of negotiations with the EU, that began in 2021, and which culminated in February 2023 with the Prime Minister

announcing the Windsor Framework. The Framework contains legally binding changes to the old Protocol, including to restore the smooth flow of trade within the UK Internal Market Scheme; to protect Northern Ireland's place within the Union by disapplying large amounts of EU law in areas such as medicines, VAT and duties; and to address the democratic deficit through a Stormont Brake on new EU law.

The changes contained in the Windsor Framework represented a significant improvement on the old Protocol. It alone, however, did not prove sufficient to allow the devolved institutions to function with the cross-community support required by the Belfast Agreement.

Therefore, in January 2024, the UK Government brought forward the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, designed to strengthen further the UK internal market and Northern Ireland's place within the Union, now and in the long term. Specifically, it addresses ongoing concerns about trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland by ensuring that goods that will never leave the United Kingdom are subject to no checks, save for those conducted by UK authorities as part of a risk-based or intelligence-led approach to tackle criminality, abuse of the scheme, smuggling and disease risks. Northern Ireland's unfettered access to the UK internal market – by far its most important – is guaranteed. We have also ensured that Northern Ireland will benefit from the trade deals we can reach with countries across the world as a result of our leaving the European Union on the same basis as other parts of the United Kingdom. The Command Paper also recognises the importance of strengthening connections across the United Kingdom through a new East-West Council and a new trade body, Intertrade UK.

Since the publication of the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, we have legislated to:

- ▶ **affirm Northern Ireland's position as an integral part of the United Kingdom;**
- ▶ **future proof Northern Ireland's unfettered access to the rest of the UK's internal market;**
- ▶ **amend Section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to end the automatic pipeline of new EU law applying in Northern Ireland, making it subject to the Stormont Brake instead; and**
- ▶ **take powers to direct bodies in Northern Ireland to protect the UK internal market.**

We also held the inaugural meeting of the East-West Council in March, established a Veterinary Medicines Working Group, a Horticulture Working Group and confirmed there will be no Border Control Posts at Cairnryan. In addition, in February we moved a Humble Address in both Houses of Parliament.

A Conservative Government will continue to implement all of the commitments as set out in the Command Paper in the interests of building a stronger, more prosperous Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

» Strengthening Northern Ireland's economy

Northern Ireland is a great place to live, work and invest. It has a highly educated and talented workforce, a competitive labour market, lower costs than many other major competitors, excellent connectivity and infrastructure and two world-class universities with strong links to business and innovation. The Northern Ireland of today has a thriving creative sector, while Belfast is the world's top city for FinTech investment. Unemployment today stands at 2.2 per cent – the lowest of any UK region – compared with just over 7 per cent when Labour last left office in 2010.

As a result of the Windsor Framework, Northern Ireland retains unfettered access to the UK internal market along with privileged access for goods into the EU Single Market, providing unique opportunities for the Northern Ireland economy. All of this was highlighted at the Investment Summit hosted by the UK Government in September 2023, which attracted 181 potential international investors.

Of course, Northern Ireland continues to benefit enormously from the strength and security of being an integral part of the United Kingdom, the world's sixth largest economy. At the last Spending Review in 2021 we provided £15 billion a year for Northern Ireland – an additional £1.6 billion a year than in the previous Spending Review period and a record funding settlement. To coincide with the restoration of devolution in February, we announced a financial package worth £3.3 billion for the Northern Ireland Executive to help stabilise public services, better manage public finances, improve infrastructure and deliver pay awards for public sector workers.

In line with commitments set out in the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, on 21 May 2024 the Government agreed a new interim fiscal framework with the Northern Ireland Executive. This provides Northern Ireland with a new needs-based funding formula which will ensure a 24 per cent uplift in the Barnett formula if its funding falls short of its relative need per head. It also contains an immediate £20 million boost to the Executive's annual capital borrowing powers, which will rise in line with inflation from 2025-26 onwards. This delivers on our plan to support sustainable public finances and provide greater clarity on funding. It is also testimony again to the strength and security gained by being part of the United Kingdom.

In addition to this, a Conservative Government has given communities in Northern Ireland control over £104 million of funding through our Shared Prosperity Fund and £120 million through the Levelling Up Fund.

This funding forms parts of the £1 billion the UK Government has invested in levelling up Northern Ireland, including delivering Northern Ireland's first ever City Deals. The largest of these, the Belfast Region City Deal, provides £350 million of UK Government funding, alongside investment from the Executive and local authorities, for 20 ambitious projects that aim to provide up to 20,000 jobs. Other Deals are in place for Derry City and Strabane, the Mid South West Region and Causeway Coast and Glens. A Conservative Government will continue to support these local growth deals to ensure that they spread investment, prosperity and jobs right across Northern Ireland.

We are also cutting taxes for hardworking people. Cuts to National Insurance have already benefited over 800,000 workers in Northern Ireland by an average of £620 a year, and we will go further to cut it by another 2p and abolish the main rate of self-employed National Insurance entirely. Only a Conservative Government can be trusted to keep taxes as low as possible, cutting them when conditions

allow, unlike Labour whose uncosted promises would mean tax rises right across the whole of the United Kingdom.

A Conservative Government will take forward the economic commitments in the Safeguarding the Union Command Paper, including:

- › **the new East-West Council and Intertrade UK;**
- › **supporting a Northern Ireland Enhanced Investment Zone;**
- › **a Joint Exchequer Committee to make progress on devolving Corporation Tax;**
- › **strengthening defence industries; and**
- › **bolstering East-West transport links and boosting international connectivity.**

While many economic policies are the responsibility of the Executive at Stormont, economic decisions taken in Westminster also have a significant impact on people living in Northern Ireland. As part of the United Kingdom, the strength of the Northern Ireland economy remains inextricably linked to that of the country as a whole. A Conservative Government will stick to the plan that is reducing inflation and delivering economic growth, stability and security for Northern Ireland, compared to Labour, who have no plan, cannot say how they would pay for their policies and who would take Northern Ireland back to square one.

» **A shared society**

As Conservatives and Unionists, we want to see a Northern Ireland where society is stronger and more united and everybody has a genuinely shared future. While progress has been made, in too many respects Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. For example, only around 8 per cent of students are educated in integrated schools, over 90 per cent of public housing remains segregated and so-called ‘peace walls’ continue to keep communities apart, especially in parts of Belfast. Clearly, more work needs to be done.

While most of the responsibility for this lies with the Executive at Stormont, the UK Government can and does play a role. For example, under the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, we provided significant funding for integrated and shared education over a ten-year period. In July 2022, the UK Government also announced additional funding of £1.9 million for the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education over a two-year period to 2025. A Conservative Government will continue to do what we can to promote and build a more genuinely integrated and shared society, including asking the Royal Commission designing our modern National Service programme to consider how it can best support integration and engage with Northern Ireland’s strong third sector.

» Addressing the legacy of the Troubles

Over 3,500 people were killed in the period known as the Troubles, between the mid-1960s and April 1998 when the Belfast Agreement was reached. Tens of thousands more were maimed or seriously injured. All of this has left a bitter legacy within Northern Ireland which undermines stability, entrenches divisions in society and casts a long shadow over political debate.

As Conservatives, we are very clear that none of the terrorist campaigns that took place in Northern Ireland – republican or loyalist – were ever justified or justifiable. We will always reject any attempts to re-write history through a counternarrative of the Troubles that seeks to place the state at the heart of every atrocity, denigrates the contribution of our Armed Forces and the police and seeks to justify terrorism.

We will also never accept any moral equivalence between those who set out to uphold democracy and the rule of law and those who sought to destroy both by violence. Over 250,000 people served in Operation Banner, the longest continuous deployment in the history of the British Army. The overwhelming majority, in both the Armed Forces and the police, did so with professionalism, bravery, restraint and honour often in the most dangerous circumstances. We acknowledge that some acted outside of the law and have held them to account when this has been found to be the case.

Overall, however, the record of those who served is one of which they, and we, can be proud. Without their service and sacrifice there would have been not peace process. Their efforts ensured that the future of Northern Ireland will only ever be decided by democracy and consent, and never by violence. A Conservative

Government will, therefore, never forget the huge debt of gratitude that we owe them.

The 1998 Belfast Agreement did not attempt to resolve matters arising from the legacy of the Troubles, which at the time was seen as simply too raw an issue. Since then, successive governments have sought to bring forward proposals to deal with the past, but nothing was successfully implemented. The legacy section of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement was a genuine attempt to move things forward, but stalled as it was being converted into draft legislation. By the time of the 2019 General Election, some five years on and despite intensive efforts, it was still no closer to being implemented.

It was for that reason that in 2020 the UK Government began developing an approach to legacy, consistent with many of the principles of the Stormont House Agreement, that focused primarily on information recovery, rather than traditional criminal justice outcomes.

This culminated in the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, which became law in September 2023. It followed a realistic assessment of what could usefully be delivered for victims and survivors of the Troubles in the context of current mechanisms working for only a very small minority and the fact that – 25 years after the Belfast Agreement, nearly 30 years since the ceasefires and over 50 years since the start of the Troubles – the prospects of successful prosecutions would be vanishingly rare.

At the core of the legislation is the new Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR). The Commission will conduct reviews, including criminal investigations, into Troubles related deaths or serious injury when requested by a close family member. Its purpose is to provide more answers to many more families about what happened to loved ones, far more quickly than is possible under more traditional routes, such as inquests.

In law, it must be headed by a serving or retired judge, while the Director of Investigations has full police powers and the ability to compel witnesses. State agencies are under an obligation to disclose all information to the Commission that it might reasonably require to carry out its investigations. During the legislation's passage through the Lords, the Government took action to strengthen its independence and to increase the sanctions on individuals who refuse to co-operate or who seek to mislead the Commission. At the conclusion of its investigations the Commission will publish a Family Report setting out, to the best of its ability, the facts of what happened.

In order to encourage people to come forward, the legislation contains provisions for the Commission to grant conditional immunity to individuals in cases where they co-operate to an acceptable standard with its investigations. While we recognise that this is difficult and challenging for many, we feel it is appropriate in the circumstances to help conduct effective investigations and provide answers to victims. We will continue appealing a ruling at the High Court in Belfast which opposed these measures and vigorously defend the unnecessary and unhelpful case taken against the United Kingdom by the Irish Government in the European Court of Human Rights.

The legislation contains other provisions to promote greater reconciliation in Northern Ireland. These include a memorialisation strategy, which will be led by independent experts who will report to the Government, and an Oral History Project which will enable individuals, some often under-represented in the various narratives around the Troubles, to tell their stories.

The ICIR became fully operational on 1 May 2024 under the distinguished leadership of the former Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Sir Declan Morgan KC. We believe that the Commission has the ability, acting independently, to carry out effective

investigations and provide answers to victims and survivors of the Troubles and in so doing, along with the other measures in the legislation, help society in Northern Ireland move forward.

A Conservative Government will, therefore, continue to support the full implementation of the Act, in contrast to Labour, whose pledge to repeal the legislation would take us back to square one, meaning most victims waiting years for answers, if at all, and would see many elderly veterans and victims, and their families, being dragged back into the courtroom.

In August 1998, just over four months after the Belfast Agreement was reached, a bomb planted by the Real IRA in Omagh killed 29 people and two unborn children. It was a sickening atrocity, but as it occurred after the 1998 Agreement it falls outside the scope of the Legacy Act. Following a court case brought by some of the families of those killed, the UK Government announced in February 2023 that it would establish a public inquiry, led by the Scottish judge, Lord Turnbull. The terms of reference were announced in February 2024 and the Inquiry will focus on the four grounds identified by the Northern Ireland High Court as giving rise to plausible arguments that the bombing could have been prevented. As the Omagh atrocity had a strong cross-border element we will continue to press the Irish Government to co-operate fully with it.

» Protecting Northern Ireland's security

For the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland, the security situation has been completely transformed since the Troubles. It is worth recalling that in the years leading up to the ceasefires in 1994, roughly 100 people a year were killed. In the worst year of the Troubles, 1972, over 470 people lost their lives. Since 1998, an entire generation has grown up without the constant threat of terrorist atrocities or the inconvenience of the security force activities that were necessary to combat it. There can be no going back to the dark days of Northern Ireland's past.

Regrettably, however, there remain groups in Northern Ireland, so called dissident republicans, who are determined to pursue their political objectives through terrorist violence. While they are small in number, these groups retain both lethal intent and capability. Their principal targets remain members of the police and prison services, as was seen by the near fatal shooting of an off-duty police officer in Omagh in February 2023, but their total disregard for life was highlighted by the killing of journalist, Lyra Mckee, in Londonderry in April 2019.

The fact that these groups do not carry out more attacks is mainly down to the skill, and bravery, of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and other security partners, principally MI5. They work tirelessly, often in great danger, to keep the entire community in Northern Ireland safe and secure from the threat posed by dissident republicans and we remain indebted to them for what they do.

Since April 2010, policing in Northern Ireland has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive and the PSNI are funded by the

Department of Justice through the block grant. National security, and combating Northern Ireland Related Terrorism (NIRT), however, remains the responsibility of the Secretary of State and the UK Government. In recognition of this, since 2010 we have provided the PSNI with additional security funding, which in the 2021 Spending Review period was set at £32 million a year through to 2024-25.

As a result of the efforts of the PSNI and its partners, the number of national security attacks has fallen from 40 in 2010 to just one in 2023. In fact, 2023 was the first year since records began when there was not a single death related to security in Northern Ireland. Despite this, the threat level, assessed independently of government, remains 'Substantial', meaning that an attack is likely. The need for vigilance remains and a Conservative Government will always provide the fullest possible support to those who defend us.

Paramilitary activity remains a scourge on society in many parts of Northern Ireland, especially in more disadvantaged areas. These are people who espouse a political cause largely as cover for intimidation, extortion, drug dealing and other forms of gangsterism. They claim to protect communities, but in reality they hold them back. There was never any place for paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland and there is none today.

The lead responsibility for developing a strategy for tackling paramilitarism rests with the Executive but the UK Government has a role in this too. Following the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, the UK Government provided the Executive with £25 million of funding to help the fight against paramilitarism and organised crime. In 2016 we passed legislation to establish the Independent Reporting Commission to examine progress on bringing paramilitary activity to an end.

Through the 2021 Spending Review and the

New Decade, New Approach agreement, we committed around £8 million per year to the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme to match the Executive's funding until the end of the second phase of the Programme in March 2024. The Programme supports the Paramilitary Crime Task Force, which includes PSNI, the National Crime Agency and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

A Conservative Government will work with the Executive towards our ultimate objectives – a Northern Ireland in which all paramilitary groups have disbanded, are no longer shackling communities and are firmly a thing of the past. Now that the Executive is restored, we will seek to do this with renewed vigour and determination.





The Northern Ireland Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2024

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