

Alliance Works

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Alliance

Manifesto for the
Northern Ireland Assembly Elections

26 November 2003

building a united community

visionary

PEACE

inclusive

equal citizenship

STABILITY

integration

open, free and fair society

modern and vibrant party

DIVERSITY

shared future

forward thinking

modern and vibrant party

integration

STABILITY

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open, free and fair society

equal citizenship

DIVERSITY



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STABILITY

Alliance Works. Tribal Politics Doesn't.

Making Devolution Work

This election should be about bread and butter issues, and what an Assembly can do for you.

Our devolved Assembly has given the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to choose their own future. Decisions can now be taken, policies implemented, and legislation passed which are much more responsive to the needs of the people that they affect.

In recognition of this new opportunity, Alliance is issuing its most detailed manifesto for any election. It has been shaped through a wide consultation with Party members, representatives of the business, voluntary and community sector, and most importantly, ordinary citizens.

Building a united community and creating a shared future lie at the heart of the Alliance policy agenda. Tackling the divisions within our deeply divided society must be the greatest priority for our political institutions. Unless we seriously address these problems, they will eventually destroy the Agreement and all that has been achieved so far.

The Assembly is also the representative voice of the people of Northern Ireland—in dealings with the United Kingdom, both centrally and in the devolved nations and regions; the Republic of Ireland; the European Union and even further afield.

Alliance is looking forward to the time when policing and criminal justice functions can be transferred to the Assembly. We have included a substantial section on justice and the rule of law, issues on which we will lobby the Government until responsibility for justice is devolved. It is a matter of great concern that Northern Ireland lags so far behind the rest of the UK in this area.

Sectarianism and segregation carry considerable human and financial costs. We have identified hundreds of millions of pounds wasted in needless duplication of facilities to cater for separate demands. These resources could be put to much greater use in improving public services.

Devolution offers so much potential, but instead we have had five years of wasted opportunities.

The record of the parties in the Executive to date has not been impressive. Even allowing for the stop-start approach to devolution, they have made little difference to people's lives. Much of the legislation introduced by Ministers has been merely copied from Westminster, with little consideration of local needs and concerns. Decisions on some of the most pressing issues facing Northern Ireland have been postponed.

Most importantly, those charged with the responsibility of Government have not even begun to address the biggest problem—the continued deep divisions within our society.

Making the Agreement Work

However, this election is also about restoring trust and confidence in the political process.

In 1998, people voted for a new beginning. While in many respects Northern Ireland is better than it was a decade ago, the progress that people had a right to expect over the past five years has not occurred. Instead, the Unionist and Nationalist parties have wasted time with their continued squabbling and failures to implement the Agreement.

Rather than working together for the good of all, they have pursued their own narrow

agendas and have bickered over issues like policing reform.

Even today, rather than looking to a shared future together, the UUP and SDLP are moving to the extremes, looking over their shoulders at the DUP and Sinn Fein.

The Agreement remains the only way forward to peace and stability in this society. The demands from others for ‘renegotiation’ are completely unrealistic. We cannot allow others to rip it up and start all over again.

Instead, Alliance will push for positive changes to make the Agreement work better for all.

Our priorities will be to:

- remove the sectarian aspects of the Agreement, such as designations
- provide for more effective government with collective responsibility
- ensure that Loyalists and Republicans complete the final journey from violence to democracy

Alliance — Making the Difference

Alliance is the political voice of those who work to create a united community, one characterised by sharing, not separation. We offer everyone an invitation to join something different, something better than tribal politics — a genuinely shared and non-sectarian future.

Only Alliance rejects the notion that we must all be pigeon-holed into ‘two communities’, only Alliance respects personal choice over identity.

The Alliance alternative is an open, free and fair society, where we are all equal citizens — not a society where we merely tolerate difference, but rather a society where we celebrate diversity and cherish individuality.

We can achieve this vision within the Agreement, an updated and better Agreement. For Alliance, the Agreement is not the ceiling of our ambition. It is the foundation on which we can create a better future.

I hope you share our vision and can support our action plan for Northern Ireland, as presented in the following pages. Every first preference vote will help us as we work to realise a better future for all of us.



David Ford
Party Leader

1. Governing a Shared Northern Ireland

The Agreement

Alliance reiterates its full support for the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement represents an historic accommodation among the various political traditions in Northern Ireland, north and south, and all of these islands. Its major strength continues to be the creation of a set of political institutions with cross-community legitimacy within a deeply divided society. The Agreement also provides the opportunity to discuss and develop some fundamental aspects of a shared society, like human rights, equality and social justice.

Yet the implementation of the Agreement has been undermined by continued bickering among the pro-Agreement parties and their failure to rise above narrow sectarian concerns to work for the common good. At the outset, the Agreement was seen as a win-win by all sections of the community. Sadly, it is today regarded in zero-sum terms, with a gain one for one section of the community being perceived as a loss by another.

Most crucially, we have witnessed a deterioration in community relations and an increase in sectarianism, racism and segregation on the ground. Regrettably, the Agreement has played a major role in contributing to an institutionalised sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Comprehensive Review

Several years on, it is possible to view the Agreement and its implementation from a clearer and more critical perspective. Over the past five years, these deficiencies and flaws in the Agreement have come into much clearer focus.

Fortunately, the Agreement does provide the terms for its own comprehensive review. It is now necessary to review its terms and structures, and to learn the lessons of experience.

This will not be a renegotiation, but rather improvements to the working of the Agreement, firmly based on the principles of the Agreement.

Alliance's proposals for the Comprehensive Review are rooted in the party's key values:

- Commitment to exclusively democratic and non-violent principles.
- Opposition to sectarianism, racism and other forms of arbitrary division.
- Commitment to human rights, fair play and social justice.

The 'constitutional issue' is not a defining issue that preoccupies the Alliance Party. In keeping with the three core values the party's main concern is that the people's consent is paramount and that the legitimate interests of all are safeguarded.

Alliance is firmly committed to the principle of power sharing. We favour a move away from the rigid, consociational form of power sharing contained in the original Agreement, towards more flexible and integrated versions of power sharing more appropriate for an evolving and diverse society. Ultimately, our objective is to fashion Northern Ireland as a model European liberal democracy.

Alliance Proposals for the Review

Before the commencement of the scheduled formal Review of the Agreement, Alliance will be presenting a detailed paper setting out our proposals for making the Agreement work better. Our full proposals will include the following:

Constitutional Status

Alliance restates its support for the Principle of Consent. **Alliance believes that the people of Northern Ireland should not be restrained from devising and advocating any constitutional outcome**, not merely a straight choice between the maintenance of the United Kingdom or a united Ireland.

1. Governing a Shared Northern Ireland

Size of the Assembly

Alliance believes that the Assembly is too large, and consequently too expensive. **Alliance will support moves to reduce the size of the Assembly.**

Designations and Voting System

Alliance is concerned at the sectarian nature of the Assembly designations and related voting system. It is crucially important that, in a deeply divided society, significant matters in the Assembly are decided on a cross-community basis. However, there are several different forms of cross-community voting, not confined to the two versions in the Agreement. There are four particular problems with the current system:

- the institutionalisation of sectarian division
- a lack of equality of votes between MLAs
- an inability to adjust to changing demographic and political circumstances
- the ability of minorities to effectively hold the process to ransom

Alliance strongly advocates the use of a weighted majority, free from any communal designations, for key decisions in the Assembly.

The Executive

The NI Executive has not performed as expected. Much of this is due to poor design. Through an involuntary coalition, there is no requirement or incentive for parties to abide by collective responsibility. Ministers can run their Departments as personal fiefdoms. There is little scope for removing a Minister who is underperforming or who is politically inept.

Alliance argues that the Executive should be formed as a voluntary power-sharing coalition, endorsed by a weighted majority vote in the Assembly to ensure a cross-community composition. It should be possible for parties to

negotiate a balanced executive, with an agreed programme for government. This would be required to achieve a cross-community weighted-majority vote in the Assembly in order for it to come into effect.

Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Alliance advocates the abolition of the current Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, to be replaced by a more streamlined office, with appropriate functions being reallocated to dedicated Departments.

The First Minister would fulfil the normal functions of a chief minister, chair meetings of the executive, and provide a representational service. A Deputy First Minister would deputise for the First Minister.

Ministerial Accountability

To date, Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive have been able to take decisions within their own area of responsibility with little or no political checks and balances, and only the minimum protections provided by law. At the same time, the Statutory Committees have not been as effective as envisaged.

Alliance proposes to give the Assembly the power to nullify a Ministerial decision, through a weighted majority vote.

Committee Chairs

The d'Hondt system is a poor form of proportionality that is prone to major distortions. **Alliance would replace the d'Hondt system for allocating Chairs of Committees**, with a fairer and more effective system, where such a mechanism is required. One possibility would be via an STV election by the MLAs.

1. Governing a Shared Northern Ireland

NI Assembly and Oireachtas

There is a need for more openness and transparency within the North-South Ministerial Council. **Alliance believes that the Taoiseach and Tanaiste, First Minister and Deputy First Minister should make a joint report** on the NSMC activities in each of the respective legislatures every year.

Alliance also believes that the Assembly and the Oireachtas should be required to establish a North-South Parliamentary Tier, open to all parties, with each jurisdiction sending equal numbers of participants.

Promoting Community Relations

Community relations must be given a higher profile following the Review of the Agreement.

Alliance proposes to place a statutory obligation on public authorities to carry out functions with due regard to the need to promote good relations between all sections of society. This would be of a similar nature to the current equality duty.

Human Rights

Alliance stresses our continued support for the work of the NI Human Rights Commission. There is a concerted attack on the Commission from both Nationalists and Unionists. The Commission is hampered by ambiguous mandate, related to the 'two communities'.

Alliance believes that the NIHRC should be given a clear remit to devise a Bill of Rights to protect individuals, minorities and communities in Northern Ireland.

Definition of a Ceasefire

The Government has maintained a distinction between a ceasefire and a cessation of all violence; Alliance has not. This distinction should be closed. Paragraph 13 of the Joint Declaration should be the basis of any definition of an end to all paramilitary activity:

“Paramilitarism and sectarian violence ... must be brought to an end, from whichever part of the community they come. We need to see an immediate, full and permanent cessation of all paramilitary activity, including military attacks, training, targeting, intelligence gathering, acquisition or development of arms or weapons, other preparations for terrorist campaigns, punishment beatings and attacks and involvement in riots. Moreover, the practice of exiling must come to an end and the exiled must feel free to return in safety. Similarly, sectarian attacks and intimidation directed at vulnerable communities must cease.”

Alliance believes that the above standard should be incorporated into the Pledge of Office.

Review of Public Administration

The current Review of Public Administration does not address the responsibilities of the 11 Government Departments. **Alliance believes it is essential that the separate Review of the Agreement recommends a reduction of government bureaucracy at this level first**, before the Review of Public Administration agrees changes at lower levels.

Northern Ireland is over governed relative to comparative areas elsewhere in these islands. This is compounded by the unnecessary and expensive duplication of facilities.

The structures for the administration of health and education are clearly identified as some of those most in need of reform.

A number of principles will guide the Alliance approach to the Review of Public Administration:

1. Governing a Shared Northern Ireland

First, public bodies must be responsive to the needs of communities. Alliance sees a role for a range of regional, sub-regional and local bodies. Services should be delivered as close to the people concerned while taking into account efficiency and effectiveness.

Second, the reform of public bodies should take on board the need to promote integration and better community relations. Administrative boundaries should not be created so as to reinforce separation in society, but rather to promote mixing of people.

Third, reform of public administration must be governed by pragmatism rather than ideology. Alliance will not take an ideological position in favour of either the use of the public or the private sector, but will support whatever approach is the most appropriate for delivering the best quality services in each circumstance.

Wider Relations

Alliance will promote Northern Ireland as a distinct region within a devolving British Isles, and an evolving Europe of the regions. 19th century notions of sovereignty are no longer appropriate in the early 21st century. Although Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom, it should be encouraged to develop a range of relationships with the Republic of Ireland, as well as with Scotland, Wales, the English regions and the Crown dependencies of the British Isles. Furthermore, Northern Ireland should increasingly develop its links with Europe and North America.

Alliance is a strongly pro-European party. We have an excellent record of participation in wider European and international debates through our membership of the European Liberal Democratic and Reform (ELDR) Party, and Liberal International.

- **Alliance supports the enlargement of the European Union.** Enlargement will create wider markets for Northern Ireland, and bring more and more people into the benefits of EU membership.
- **Alliance supports the United Kingdom's entry into the Euro** at the earliest appropriate opportunity. Alliance believes that UK membership of the Euro is vital to the long-term economic interests of Northern Ireland, particularly given our land border with the Republic of Ireland.
- **Alliance will establish a European Affairs Committee** in the NI Assembly. This committee would monitor and prepare for developments within the European Union. Such a committee has already been established in the Oireachtas.

2. Building a United Community

Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. But rather than these communal divisions being addressed and overcome, they are becoming institutionalised.

Sectarianism and segregation remain major scars on Northern Ireland, and have even intensified in recent years.

Sectarian attitudes are not restricted to those in and around interfaces, but permeate throughout society. Sectarianism is about prejudice, scapegoating, and putting people into boxes.

The dominant view, both from the Agreement and many aspects of Government policy, is that Northern Ireland is permanently divided into separate Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist communities.

The state caters to these ‘separate communities’ with needlessly duplicating facilities, wasting resources that could otherwise be used to improve the quality of services.

Yet there is substantial evidence that a clear majority of the people in Northern Ireland would like to have mixed facilities in which to live, to work, and to be educated. Almost a quarter of Protestants and a third of Catholics do not wish to be described as either Unionist or Nationalist. Furthermore, the 2001 Census showed that 14% of the population do not wish to be described as either Protestant or Catholic.

Skilful conflict management of a so-called ‘benign apartheid’ cannot be sustained. With little or no common bonds, it is relatively easy for ‘separate communities’ to go their different ways with any major crisis.

The healing of our communal divisions must be the greatest priority for our political institutions, and thus lies at the heart of Alliance’s policy agenda.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

- **Develop a new community relations strategy for Northern Ireland.** This should challenge how we live and learn, work and play together as a community.
- **Actively encourage de-segregation and communal integration,** through appropriate policies and by placing a duty upon all government departments and public sector agencies. This includes areas such as planning.
- **Introduce a new form of policy proofing, called Policy Appraisal for Sharing over Separation (PASS).** This would ensure that the impact of any new policy upon community divisions would be assessed and taken into account.
- **Appoint an Integration Monitor.** This person would be charged with monitoring progress on the above proposals, and producing an annual audit of the costs of providing separate facilities.
- **Provide support for the work of the Community Relations Council,** and significantly increase its budget, in order to expand its project work. Alliance would increasingly concentrate community investment funds on projects with a strong cross-community element.
- **Achieve a target of 10% of children being educated in integrated schools by 2010.** We set out how we will accomplish this in the Education section of this manifesto.
- **Make the promotion and maintenance of mixed housing an explicit objective** of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
- **Urge the police and criminal justice agencies to adopt a more pro-active policy** of protecting and serving those individuals who choose to mix with others, in the name of preserving a common civic space.
- **Enforce the civil duties on public agencies,** such as the Road Service and the Housing Executive, to ensure that their property is free from paramilitary, sectarian or racist flags, murals and graffiti.
- **Ensure that public sector agencies build new leisure, educational, health, social and community facilities** with an explicit objective to encourage mixing. Best practice should also be developed, regarding the design of the urban environment, in order to maximise cross-community integration.
- **Promote Northern Ireland as a distinct region** within a decentralising British Isles and an emerging Europe of the Regions.
- **Propose new symbols** to be devised to give expression to this regional identity, including a new flag for Northern Ireland. Greater use should also be made of the European flag.

2. Building a United Community

Equality

Alliance will promote equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, equality of access, and equality under the law for all people, irrespective of:

- Gender
- Age
- Marital or family status
- Religious belief
- Disability
- Perceived race or ethnic origin
- Nationality
- Sexual orientation

We are opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. To this end, Alliance makes the following pledges—

- **Ensure the development and passage of a Single Equality Act.** This will provide a holistic approach to combat discrimination and other forms of unfair treatment.
- **Amend Fair Employment Monitoring Regulations,** to stop people being assigned as either 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' against their will. Similarly, Alliance will prevent the next census from pigeon-holing those who do not declare a religious belief to a 'religious community' against their will. Alliance stresses that people should be able to hold open, mixed and multiple identities.
- **Propose that the list of organisations exempt from Fair Employment Regulations be revised.** In particular, the ability of schools to hire teachers and other staff from one or the other 'community background' should be reviewed.
- **Develop an inclusive inter-departmental strategy on gender equality.**
- **Ensure that the interests and needs of persons belonging to ethnic minorities are included** in the broader framework of community relations.
- **Support measures to eradicate age discrimination.** This includes the voluntary extension of work, and the provision of health and social services.

3. Strengthening Our Economy

Alliance favours a mixed economy, in which a primacy of market solutions is balanced by a government and public concern for social justice. The role of government, especially with the onset of a knowledge-driven economy, should be to create the right framework conditions for a dynamic and high-growth economy.

A successful economy and prosperity are essential to creating the favourable conditions for the development of a shared, non-sectarian society, and giving people a stake in the consolidation of peace.

The economy of Northern Ireland is our own responsibility. We must stand on our own financial feet. What is required is a change of attitude.

We need to encourage entrepreneurship and applaud local success stories. We need to be positive and outward-looking, with confidence in our abilities and skills. We need a 'can-do' culture that focuses on results.

We must give greater recognition for the increasingly vital role women have in our economy. This includes removing social barriers to their promotion to upper management, and delivering equal pay. Alliance is confident in the abilities and skills of men and women, equally.

Our economy will be driven forward by private business. Government can encourage this by removing structural obstacles. Our vision must be modernised:

- Northern Ireland suffers from the lack of control over fiscal policy. This contributes to an over-dependence on grants rather than tax-breaks and incentives for attracting inward investment. We need to be more financially independent, so we can take more responsibility for our spending priorities.
- Northern Ireland has too small a base in new high-tech, knowledge-based industries. We spend too little on Research and Development, which curtails innovation.
- The Euro-zone (especially including the Republic of Ireland) and EU enlargement will further force Northern Ireland companies to be more globally competitive.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

- **Build an economy** based on the principles of profitability, sustainable development, enterprise, equality of opportunity and social inclusion. This includes removing all obstacles for equal pay for equal work.
- **Use tax-varying powers (when achieved)** to rate taxation according to profitability, employee size, and/or growth potential. This provision of enhanced tax incentives could be the first of its kind to produce rewards for success, and encourage growth at an exponential rate. For example, Alliance would reduce tax for SMEs with less than 3 years of trade. We would also lobby for the threshold for VAT to be raised to £75,000.
- **Introduce a new Northern Ireland Quality mark.** Cheaper to access than the British Standards kite and ISO9000 schemes, the Northern Ireland Quality mark will create loyalty and trust for local consumers, and sales and growth for Northern Ireland companies. The Northern Ireland Quality mark can also serve to mediate in consumer issues.
- **Promote best practice in environmental performance.** Alliance will expand the availability of tools available to help companies achieve this. (See also our commitment to a Green Economy Task Force.)
- **Lobby for the introduction of the Euro.** Membership of the Euro could bring net benefits such as greater economic stability, lower interest rates, lower inflation, a more favourable climate for investment, greater price transparency and competition, reduced transaction costs, and the reduction of risk associated with fluctuating exchange rates.
- **Reduce needless regulations and bureaucracy for small businesses.** Such obstacles to growth must be minimised.
- **Lobby for age-positive hiring programmes.** Forcing older people to prematurely leave their employment robs the economy of decades of knowledge and expertise. We recommend re-training of the older workforce, and we will provide positive solutions to employers, to employ older workforces.
- **Lobby for the minimum wage to be extended to those aged 16+.** Young employees should not be paid less for the same work, simply because of their age.
- **Develop Information Technology in Northern Ireland.** We will lead a drive to improve the understanding of this sector and support from leading businesses, banks and government departments. We will provide assistance, where necessary, in order to encourage IT to grow.

3. Strengthening Our Economy

- **Lobby for positive change in re-employment schemes.** New Deal has been too cumbersome. We need better and more efficient schemes to recruit women, mature trainees and the long-term unemployed.
- **Support parental leave schemes,** so that fathers as well as mothers can address the competing demands of work and family life.
- **Introduce an Employment Appeals Tribunal.** Combined with more informal arbitration services, we will reform and improve the efficiency of the tribunal system. There needs to be equal representation for both employer and employee in the tribunal service.
- **Integrate economic and education policy.** The needs of business can be compatible with educational provision. For example, collaborative clusters of schools, businesses and colleges should be established. Lifelong learning can maximise an individual's employability.
- **Give priority to the Belfast–Dublin, Derry–Dublin and other key cross-border transport corridors.** We will also work to establish a central UK-wide plan to develop strategic routes and linkages on the west coast of Great Britain. This includes securing at least 3 direct air routes to continental Europe and 1 to the USA.
- **Increase funding for tourism product marketing activities,** to revise the overall image and profile of Northern Ireland overseas. Furthermore, Alliance believes a public-private sector partnership is central to the success of tourism. We support efforts to involve the private sector more in the growth of the tourism industry.
- **Lead the way in engaging more actively in European, UK and Republic of Ireland initiatives,** especially in areas of technology, competitiveness, IT, and education and training. This will build a wider perspective and international outlook.

Energy

A sustainable energy policy is needed for Northern Ireland, one that aims to maximise energy efficiency and minimise consumption of non-renewable resources. Consumers of energy should become more aware of the true economic and environmental costs of their consumption. Tax and subsidy regimes should be altered accordingly to better reflect the 'polluter pays' principle.

- **Buy out generating capacity currently under contract to NIE.** Alliance will introduce a low-cost borrowing mechanism, in order to reduce electricity costs to Northern Ireland consumers. If HM Treasury continues to block this proposal, then Alliance will demand the payback of the 1992 sell-off of our power stations. We must have a fair and cost-effective trading system to reduce electricity prices in Northern Ireland, which are the highest in the UK.
- **Improve capacity on the North-South electricity interconnector** and support measures to access less expensive energy supplies from Great Britain. Alliance will also deliver the extension of natural gas services to the West.
- **Promote energy efficiency and conservation.** Unacceptable amounts of energy are wasted through inefficiencies. Alliance would consider the introduction of energy rating for private dwellings and encouragement for householders to effect energy conservation.
- **Increase access of renewable energy sources to the general public.** With the development of a strategic approach, Northern Ireland is well placed to take advantage of the potential of both wind and wave energy. In a region rich in renewable resources, government policy must emphasise and encourage new, imaginative sources of energy. Energy technology should be supported by government funding as well as by the private sector.

3. Strengthening Our Economy

Agriculture and Rural Development

Northern Ireland contains many rural communities that are reliant on the agri-food industry, providing employment and a valuable contribution to our Gross Domestic Product.

Like any other sector, the forces of modernisation and globalisation cannot be ignored or wished away. Alliance will provide the leadership to face these challenges and more, to ensure the vitality and success of our food and drink industries.

Change will also occur from EU and UK-wide legislation. Alliance will assist farmers more in adjusting to new policies, and we will provide an adequate timescale for change.

- **Implement the ‘Vision Action Plan’**, an extensive modernisation programme by DARD. Assisting structural adjustment and raising farm performance are particular priorities.
- **Bring about greater co-ordination** between the Department for Agriculture & Rural Development and the Department of the Environment over agri-environment and planning policies.
- **Earmark 10% of production subsidies for environmental schemes**, as recommended in the report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food in England.
- **Ensure that money directed towards agri-environmental schemes directly benefit farmers.** Modulated funds should not be used for other aspects of departmental expenditure. Alliance will explore ways in which farmers can produce environmental benefit while increasing farm income.
- **Give farmers the option of receiving their direct support payments in euros.**
- **Initiate a re-examination of the Rural Planning strategy**, to promote balanced development, including farm diversification, in rural areas of Northern Ireland.
- **Promote the highest standards of agriculture.** We need to move away from commodity production, and develop niche markets, including organic foods, building on our existing green image. Alliance opposes the introduction of genetically-modified crops.
- **Initiate a pilot scheme of ‘demonstration farms’**, based on the New Zealand model, and as recommended in the Policy Commission report. Northern Ireland suppliers will be more competitive and efficient with a more direct, traceable route to market.
- **Improve the relationship between suppliers and retailers in Northern Ireland.** We will highly encourage suppliers, retailers and food service companies to sign up voluntarily to the ‘Code of Practice on Supermarkets’ Dealings with Suppliers’.
- **Codify all existing regulations into a single web site**, categorised around events in the lifetime of the farm. We will also seek ways to reduce and improve the efficiency of regulations.
- **Devise and implement a comprehensive animal health strategy**, by working with DEFRA and further consultation. Informed consumers will need to support highest welfare standards with their purchasing decisions.
- **Develop a strategy for organic food production.** This will cover research, development, standards and marketing, and address all parts of the food chain. We will seek practical ways to promote the production of more locally produced organic food.
- **Extend compulsory country of origin labelling.** We endorse the efforts of the Food Standards Agency to improve food labelling policy.
- **Facilitate more and better quality educational visits to farms**, in partnership with the voluntary sector.

4. Taking Responsibility for Finance

Sectarianism costs us money, not only in dealing with its violent manifestations, but in everyday life. The 'separate but equal' mindset requires duplicate facilities in our education, health and social services. This wastes money that could be used to improve the quality of services for us all. Addressing sectarianism, first and foremost, could generate the greatest savings in public expenditure.

Alliance accepts that the Executive has only limited financial resources at its disposal. The windfall from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the continuation of European Structural Funds until 2006 reflects a somewhat artificial position. In the long term, the Barnett Formula erodes the advantages in public expenditure of the Northern Ireland Administration. Therefore, there is a responsibility upon the Executive to spend resources wisely, to invest in the future, and to prioritise addressing the causes (rather than the immediate symptoms) of problems.

Any reform will require phasing in over a number of years, and Alliance would embark upon negotiations with key stakeholders.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

- **Lobby the UK Government for tax-varying powers.** This will give the Assembly a greater ability to reflect the democratic wishes of local people and to have the capability to offer tax incentives to stimulate local economic growth.
- **Reform the local rating system.** We would abolish the regional rate, and replace it with a method based on ability to pay, e.g. a local income tax.
- **Tax ownership instead of occupation.** This will increase the tax base and discourage the under-use of vacant property.
- **Implement the fairest options to pay for water costs.** EU Directives will require directly-linked payments for these costs. However, the recent Government policy initiative was disingenuous; it has an obligation to improve the infrastructure before seeking any reform of the finance and business model of the service.
- **Introduce a social partnership approach** to strategic planning of infrastructure projects in Northern Ireland. We will amend legislation so that the Strategic Investment Board contains business, voluntary and community sector stakeholders.
- **Promote the greater use of electronic delivery of public services,** and the greater accessibility of the public to Information Technology. This includes the application of e-planning. We will set targets focused on higher public usage of e-Government.
- **Decentralise more civil service jobs away from Greater Belfast,** where there is an economic advantage for relocation.
- **Reform charity law in Northern Ireland.** We would also add, as a defined charitable purpose, 'the promotion of peace and reconciliation and good community relations in Northern Ireland'.
- **Award rate relief to tourism business.** Alliance recognises the importance of tourism as a growing sector of employment in our economy. Rates are a significant direct cost to hotels and pubs.
- **Lobby the UK Exchequer to re-establish the link between the state pension and average earnings.** This is the fairest means of ensuring long-term confidence in its value.

5. Justice and a Culture of Lawfulness

Alliance is fully committed to the highest standards of justice and the rule of law. We believe that there is a fundamental relationship between democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Agreement has not been the source of the law and order problems in Northern Ireland. These problems have persisted and developed despite the Agreement. Alliance believes that the platform of the Agreement provides the best means for asserting the primacy of the rule of law, democracy, and a Bill of Rights.

Our vision of policing in Northern Ireland is of a single, integrated, professional police service that is representative of, responsive to, and carrying the confidence of the entire community. Alliance gives its full support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland in upholding the rule of law. A key element of this new beginning must be an increasingly community-based approach, which will re-enforce the needs of the community.

Action is required at a number of levels:

- The creation and maintenance of the required structures, and the provision of necessary resources
- The proper enforcement of existing laws, and the application of new legislation
- The creation and the maintenance of a culture of lawfulness

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

Structures and Resources

- **Demand that the Government abolish the use of 50:50 recruitment quotas.** We would replace this with a fairer form of affirmative action. The quota system is restricting overall recruitment. Alliance supports the objectives of greater representation in the police from all under-represented sections of society. Alliance supports target and affirmative action for Catholic and female recruitment, and proactive steps to attract persons from ethnic minorities, as well as gays and lesbians, into the police service.
- **Oppose the premature phasing out of the Full-Time Reserve.** Alliance will also push for the recruitment of the new Part-Time Reserve. We believe that the restriction on part-time reserve officers only serving in their own immediate area be lifted.
- **Propose that the Government should reassess its strategy and resources for the protection of witnesses.**
- **Lobby for the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in Northern Ireland,** in order to give the police and public authorities the powers to obtain court orders restricting the behaviour or movements of those that engage in persistent and serious loutish behaviour. These measures should be based upon the relevant elements of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).
- **Better regulate restorative justice schemes,** to deal with low-level crime and anti-social behaviour, provided that they meet certain minimum conditions. Any community-based schemes should only accept referrals from the police, criminal justice or other statutory agencies. Any referrals that come from 'community sources' should be re-directed for screening by the Police Service, at the rank of Inspector.
- **Encourage the British and Irish Governments to develop a 'hot pursuit' protocol.** This would enable the PSNI and Garda to cross over into each other's jurisdictions when in pursuit of suspects. Such an instrument could be based on the terms of the EU's Schengen Agreement, and would be an important tool in the fight against terrorism.
- **Push for the seizure of criminal assets.** We welcome the establishment of the Organised Crime Taskforce and the Assets Recovery Agency. We believe this programme will seriously frustrate the operation of all organised crime and paramilitaries.
- **Work for the phased devolution of policing and criminal justice responsibilities,** and the creation of a Northern Ireland Department of Justice.

5. Justice and a Culture of Lawfulness

Enforcement and Revision of the Criminal Law

- **Lobby for a review into the procedures regarding decisions on prosecutions and the length of sentences for offences**, such as public order and violence towards the emergency services. While it may not always be possible for the police to intervene at the time in public order incidents, Alliance believes that greater use should be made of video evidence for follow-up action.
- **Urge the Government to consider creating specific offences of engaging in paramilitary-style attacks**. This would equate to an extension of the existing offence of Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH).
- **Lobby the police to adopt a more pro-active policy of intervening** when paramilitary flags and other emblems are being erected, and to take prosecutions under the Terrorism Act (2000).
- **Advocate the creation of specific offences concerning the erection of flags or other emblems**, and the painting of murals associated with proscribed organisations.

A Culture of Lawfulness

- **Lead a culture of lawfulness**. The dominant thinking in society needs to be sympathetic and consistent with the rule of law. We must have a zero-tolerance of paramilitarism and organised crime in Northern Ireland. Alliance wants schools and civic organisations to work together to promote a culture of lawfulness. Curricula can be developed to focus on teaching the value of the rule of law, and resulting consequences for individuals and wider society.

Human Rights

As a longstanding supporter of human rights, Alliance believes that Northern Ireland should have the best set of human rights protections possible. These could, in turn, be a model for other parts of these islands and Europe. Alliance welcomes the passage of the Human Rights Act, and supports efforts of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) to draft a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

- **Lobby the NIHRC to proceed on the basis of drafting international conventions**, and properly reflect pluralism and diversity within its work.
- **Lobby for the enforcement of the Human Rights Act**, and any subsequent Northern Ireland Bill of Rights to be mainstreamed through the existing court system. Alliance will therefore reject the creation of a special human rights/constitutional court. Our supported approach will ensure that human rights are a material consideration at all levels of the judicial system.
- **Lobby the NIHRC to draw up a Charter of Freedom from Sectarianism**. This will emphasise the rights of people to live in mixed areas, to attend mixed schools, and to be supported in these choices by the state.
- **Establish an integration policy for asylum seekers in Northern Ireland**. We would abolish the current practice of placing such persons in detention.

Victims

Alliance will work to help our society move beyond a 'hierarchy of victims', in order to ensure that those who have suffered throughout the community are supported in an inclusive way. We recognise the tensions in acknowledging all victims in our society, thus commit ourselves to strategies that strive to unite our community (see separate manifesto section, 'Building a United Community').

- **Support both statutory and community projects** that help victims build a shared sense of healing and recovery. We aim to remove communal bias in any such work.
- **Lobby for the creation of a public forum** to allow victims (self-defined) to tell their stories, which would be placed on an official record.

6. Realising Potential through Education

Access to education is vital to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to realise his or her full potential. Alliance supports a universal education system, free at the point of access. Government should adequately cater for the demands of nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary places.

Furthermore, Alliance believes in lifelong learning and training. Educational opportunities must be available to all at every stage of life. The system needs to be sufficiently flexible to cater for a range of demands and abilities. The current education system serves well those most academically able, but does not adequately address the needs of pupils across the full spectrum of ability.

The system is fundamentally flawed by the segregated and fragmented nature of provision.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

Citizenship

- **Ensure a proper system of civic education at secondary school level**, as proposed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA). The benefit will be new generations of young people taking on their responsibilities of citizenship.
- **Increase anti-sectarian awareness in schools**, through civic studies courses.
- **Develop strategies to promote positive interactions between older and younger citizens.** We support intergenerational schemes that encourage schools and communities to work together.

Nursery schools

- **Guarantee a nursery school place** for every child who wishes to have one. There are 35 nursery places per 1,000 here, versus a UK average of 71.
- **Increase resources for nursery and classroom assistants.** Alliance recognises that nursery schools in Northern Ireland are a good example of how education can have an integrated ethos.

Special needs

- **Devote additional resources to the education of children with learning difficulties**, including additional numbers of teachers and classroom assistants. Alliance supports the right of choice for children with disabilities to go to the schools most appropriate for them, whether mainstream or special needs.
- **Ensure adequate provision of resources to enable young adults to attend sheltered workshops**, which provide a valuable and rewarding environment. The lack of access to such facilities causes distress to these young adults and their parents.

Post-primary education

- **Support the abolition of the 11-plus exams.** Schools should not be allowed to use academic ability to decide who should be given a place.
- **Ensure that all children would progress to study a common, middle-school curriculum**, for the first three years of post-primary education. Importantly, any existing school could provide this middle-school education.
- **Defer the age of electing a particular educational route to age 14.** We do not believe that 11 is the appropriate age to make educational decisions that will restrict later choices.
- **Provide adequate provision for distinct technical, vocational and academic educational choices.** Pupils will be free to ‘mix and match’ vocational and academic subjects. Grammar schools will be a valued sector of a greater partnership with other education providers, including the Further & Higher Education sector.
- **Bring business enterprise and business entrepreneurship into the curriculum of Northern Ireland schools.** This will require collaboration with the business sector, to ensure efficient delivery of this aspect of the curriculum.
- **Implement the use of a Pupil Profile**, which will provide a holistic assessment of pupils’ skills, abilities and interests throughout their entire educational career. The Pupil Profile would be used as a tool for pupils and parents, in consultation with teachers, to select post-primary schools and elective courses of study.

6. Realising Potential through Education

Integrated education

The Alliance Party has a long-standing commitment to the support and expansion of integrated education, based on two party principles: *pluralism in a united community* and the provision of *parental choice in education*. Integrated education is an excellent example of actual reconciliation, benefiting children and adults alike. Integrated education has also made a significant contribution to social cohesion in Northern Ireland.

Alliance will implement the following 9-point plan to expand the provision of integrated education in Northern Ireland, in line with demand:

- **Support the creation and maintenance of new-build integrated schools.**
- **Set a target of 10% of children being educated in integrated schools by 2010.**
- **Place a duty upon the Education and Library Boards to encourage the development of integrated education.** This duty exists upon Department of Education, and goes beyond mere facilitation.
- **Survey local residents**, by the Department, when new schools are being built (for example, to service new housing developments), with a presumption that they will be integrated or inter-church; as far as possible, new schools should be sited to service mixed catchment areas.
- **Encourage the transformation** of existing schools to 'transformed' integrated status.
- **Reform and relax the criteria** for the creation and maintenance of integrated schools, giving recognition of those children of mixed, other or no religious background.
- **Give formal recognition** to the contribution being made to the process of reconciliation by 'mixed' schools, those that have a mixed enrolment but no formal integrated status.
- **Oppose any creation of an established 'right' in a Bill of Rights to a guarantee of public funding for segregated schools**, as this could forever entrench segregated schools and frustrate the process of integration.
- **Advocate the de-segregation of teacher training courses and facilities**, and the familiarisation of integrated education policies and practices in such institutions.

Employment and Learning

The Northern Ireland economy depends on people with good skills and education. To move to a knowledge-based economy, access to learning must be encouraged for all. Academic, vocational and occupational pathways need to be given equal respect and appropriately resourced. Our education and training system must support lifelong learning.

- **Abolish tuition fees being charged by all Northern Ireland universities.** Cost should not prevent able students from entering a third-level education. Alliance also opposes any introduction of additional top-up fees to Northern Ireland. We support a Scottish-style endowment fund, which graduates would contribute to only after earning £17,000.
- **Enable students to repay current student loans over a longer period of time and contingent on income.** Only those earning over £23,000 would have to make repayments.
- **Encourage initiatives that increase attainment** in areas of high deprivation and draw students from across the community.
- **Increase funding for university research projects.** Such research brings about the innovation vital to the regeneration of Northern Ireland.
- **Enable full-time students access to benefits over summer vacation**, for those who are genuinely unable to find work during this time.
- **Introduce a £500 bursary for mature students.** Alliance will also continue to provide means-tested bursaries to all.
- **Introduce an entitlement to student loans for lifelong learners over 54**, and reinstate funding for LearnDirect courses for the over 60s.
- **Develop the cross-border, mutual recognition of qualifications.** We welcome the removal of the Irish language qualification as compulsory in public sector employment in the Republic of Ireland.
- **Promote citizenship education and cultural diversity**, including those values that help support lifelong learning and participation in learning opportunities. This includes the promotion of extra-curricula and personal development opportunities for students, including sporting, cultural and social activities, which add value to the learning environment.

7. Health and Social Services for a Better Life

Alliance is committed to a National Health Service free at the point of delivery and to the continued development of integrated Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland.

Alliance supports the development of primary and community care on a truly multi-disciplinary basis. Alliance believes that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must work closely with the other Departments responsible for housing, education, policing and the economy, in order to promote health and well-being.

Regional specialties, such as cancer treatment, need to be centralised, in order to provide the best treatment and achieve economies of scale. There is, however, a serious lack of capacity in acute hospital provision. This can be alleviated by innovative models of hospital and community provision, including the use of local hospitals in ways that address local circumstances and needs. There should be no standard model. Rather, each hospital should reflect local needs and strengths.

Alliance believes that the health sector is one where significant benefits can come from cross-border co-operation, through the mutual provision of hospital services (particularly emergency services), the sharing of specialised equipment, and the employment of an air ambulance, amongst others.

Alliance believes that a smaller number of strengthened Health and Social Services organisations would make better use of managerial experience and resources. It is important that professionals and local communities are fully involved in shaping future developments.

Alliance believes that Health and Social Services have been greatly impeded by a lack of clear decision making. The length of time taken to consult and decide issues has been excessive.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

- **Distribute resources in favour of Health and Social Services.** Alliance would make a commitment to raise the share of GDP spent on the NHS to the average EU level within five years.
- **Introduce free personal care** for those living in residential and nursing homes, as it is in Scotland. Only Alliance MLAs voted for such a provision in the Northern Ireland Assembly. We would also remove the age restrictions on the receipt of disability benefits.
- **Develop radiotherapy and chemotherapy services** within an acute hospital setting. These services play a central role in the curative and palliative treatment of cancer.
- **Ensure the continued operation of the Home Safe Loan scheme**, designed to provide householders, particularly in deprived areas, with safety equipment for their home.
- **Prioritise cardiovascular disease prevention** in public health strategy. Coronary heart disease in Northern Ireland is one of the highest in Europe.
- **Adopt a two-year training course for ambulance paramedics.** An improved ambulance service is an integral part of the emergency service.
- **Introduce greater controls on the use of pesticides, antibiotics and growth promoters.** Alliance is committed to the safety and protection of organic food production.
- **Develop rehabilitation services.** This includes the need to increase the number of occupational therapists, to further reduce an unacceptable backlog, as well as to allow people to regain best possible quality of life and live longer in their own homes.
- **Abolish eye and dental check charges**, and ensure the availability of NHS dental care.
- **Provide free digital hearing aids** for those who need them.
- **Develop community services for people with learning difficulties.** We are particularly concerned at the shortfalls in day and respite care as well as in employment opportunities.
- **Develop primary and community care-based mental health services**, including out-of-hours services. This can ensure early, skilled intervention, as well as to prevent admissions to hospital.

7. Health and Social Services for a Better Life

- **Increase the provision for services to support families**, to protect children from abuse and to assist children in need with disabilities. Spending in Northern Ireland is two-thirds of that in England. This poor performance by our local administration cannot be allowed to continue.
- **Develop and implement a multi-disciplinary health promotion strategy**. This should utilise the previous experience of the involvement of District Councils, and work in conjunction with schools, youth services, and the voluntary and community sectors. This strategy will be an important means of reducing teenage pregnancy and promoting the welfare of young people.
- **Amend regulations to extend the scope of nurse prescribing**.
- **Prioritise addressing the workforce crisis in Health and Social Services**. Emphasis should be placed on long-term workforce planning, staff development, and active measures that will support and retain staff (including flexible working arrangements).
- **Ensure adequate staffing of physiotherapists**, to prevent a forecasted significant shortfall. Proper staffing of physiotherapists will enable patients to get rapid access to vital rehabilitation and recovery, which will help produce shorter stays in hospital, reduce waiting lists and provide more community-based support.
- **Prohibit smoking in public places of government buildings**. We support a complete ban on tobacco advertising, and would support an increase in the price of cigarettes to pay for front line health services.
- **Support the newly founded methadone treatment facility**. Controlled by professionals, this treatment rescues vulnerable individuals from absolute despair.
- **Increase the provision of acute beds**, to address immediate need. Furthermore, we will apply waiting times as a form of service measurement, in preference to waiting lists.
- **Abolish compulsory competitive tendering of support services**. We believe that support services are fundamental to patient and client care, and are integral to Trusts, instead of being contracted out.
- **Establish arbitration tribunals** to deal with medical negligence cases. This process can be less stressful and expensive than confrontational legal cases. Often the victim is only seeking an apology, explanation and remedial health care.

8. Protecting Our Environment

Alliance believes that a quality local and global environment is integral to a good quality of life. Alliance supports regional, national, European and international efforts to protect the environment. Alliance supports the implementation of the Rio and Kyoto Treaties.

Yet there is much that can be done in Northern Ireland to protect our local environment, and to contribute to wider efforts to protect the environment generally. All sections of society, including the public and private sector, civic society and local communities, producers and consumers, have important roles to play.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

Structures

- **Establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency.** This body will have the power to enforce environmental legislation.
- **Create a Green Economy Task Force.** This body would make local businesses aware of the true economic and environmental costs of their actions, to illustrate the potential savings from the more efficient use of resources and the minimisation of waste, and to show the potential of new markets for environmentally friendly products.

Planning

Alliance favours balanced development that creates new investment, prosperity and homes, while respecting both the environment and our built heritage. Alliance is concerned at the lack of proper planning frameworks in most parts of Northern Ireland, and the particular absence of current Area Plans. Alliance is also deeply concerned at the destruction of many buildings of historic importance or architectural merit, and incursions into the Greenbelt.

- **Give District Councils the ability to initiate third-party appeals.** While it may not be practical to give this power to individual residents, Alliance believes that it should be vested in local representatives through a weighted-majority vote on the relevant District Council.
- **Initiate a general review of Planning Policy Statements (PPSs).** We will ensure that planning policies are consistent with both the economic and social needs of Northern Ireland, and the concerns of local communities.
- **Set targets for ‘brownfield development’ as part of Area Plans.**
- **Lobby for the abolition of VAT on all renovations and repairs to existing buildings.** This will protect our cultural heritage for future generations, with the judicious use of existing buildings.
- **Support the creation of additional ‘Conservation Areas’,** to protect the built environment in key areas of historical or architectural interest.
- **Ensure necessary infrastructure is put in place before new major housing developments commence.** For example, sufficient consideration must be given to potential new residents’ access to public transport.
- **Ensure that out-of-town retail developments are only permitted as part of an approved strategic plan.**
- **Amend planning regulations and procedures** so that planning applications with clear economic development potential can have accelerated consideration. This will not be carried out at the expense of standards.
- **Streamline co-ordination between the Planning Service and the Roads Service.**
- **Develop best practice regarding design of the urban environment** to maximise cross-community mixing.

8. Protecting Our Environment

Sustainable Development

Protecting the environment and developing our economy are not mutually exclusive but interdependent. Sustainable development reflects this reality.

- **Make sustainable development an overarching theme** in central, regional and local government. Furthermore, Alliance will introduce an ecological footprint indicator as a means of measuring the progress of sustainable development. We believe this is the best way of assessing Northern Ireland's impact on the world's natural resources.
- **Integrate sustainable development into the Northern Ireland education curriculum.** This will include entitling quality out-of-school environmental trips and experiences.
- **Endorse the 'polluter pays' principle.** This means that those who pollute more should pay more, and provides a financial incentive to pollute less.
- **Support a shift in taxation towards pollution and resource depletion.** Consistent with the 'polluter pays' principle, the use of market forces can contribute to the protection of the environment.

Conservation

- **Implement the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy.** This strategy contains 76 recommendations for conserving and enhancing our local biodiversity—the intricate and interdependent relationships between species and their habitats—essential to the health of the whole planet.
- **Introduce legislation to ensure Marine Wildlife Conservation.** This will identify, designate and protect Marine Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Alliance is committed to the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives and the OSPAR Convention.
- **Fully implement the Water Framework Directive,** to ensure the maximum opportunities to protect and restore our wetlands. These deserve sustainable management, because wetlands protect us from floods, filter out pollutants, provide homes for wildlife, are a source of recreation and beauty, and attract thousands of visitors.
- **Ban hunting of mammals with dogs.** Hunting foxes and deer, as well as hare coursing, is incompatible with animal welfare.
- **Ban unlicensed bonfires.** Such events must be done only under approved safety conditions.

Waste Management/Recycling

Alliance is concerned at the amount of waste that is both produced and dumped in landfill within Northern Ireland. This is not only bad for the environment, but puts additional costs onto the District Rate. The Landfill Tax has already produced financial incentives to minimise landfill dumping. There are now European Union targets for waste minimisation and recycling, and a Northern Ireland waste management strategy is in place. Northern Ireland is considerably behind both the rest of the United Kingdom and most of our partners in Europe in the amount of waste that is recycled.

Alliance favours a broad-based approach to waste management that stresses waste reduction, reuse, recycling and energy recovery. Waste disposal in landfill must only be the option of last resort. It is important that all producers of waste are made aware of the true cost.

- **Introduce Public Sector Purchasing Policies that will favour recycled products.** This will give a substantial boost to the creation and maintenance of markets for such products.
- **Actively promote recycling.** This can be done through influencing public attitudes, the creation of financial incentives, lobbying Councils to introduce separate kerbside collection streams for recyclables, increasing the number of, and accessibility to, recycling facilities, and helping to consolidate markets through public purchasing policies.
- **Accelerate the implementation of the Waste Management Strategy,** and the various Waste Management Plans. Alliance favours a five-year moratorium on the creation of any waste to energy plants (incinerators) in order to allow the further development of recycling.
- **Introduce a levy on plastic bags.** A similar scheme has been launched successfully in the Republic of Ireland. We will also investigate extending such a levy to unnecessary packaging.

8. Protecting Our Environment

Transport

Safe, effective, and efficient transport is essential to the success of the economy, the protection of the local and global environment, and the quality of life of the people in Northern Ireland. Traffic levels are growing at an exponential and unsustainable rate, with increased gridlock on important roads. Investment in public transport is well behind European and even British levels. The building of more roads cannot solve our problems alone. Public transport must be developed on priority routes and in urban areas, and be safe, reliable and affordable. The creation of such a network will require a significant injection of public funds. However, we must also recognise that Northern Ireland has a large rural population that is dependent upon private transport.

- **Increase the funding directed to public transport.** At present, the Northern Ireland Regional Transportation Strategy devotes 65% of funding to roads, and only 35% to public transport. This ratio is the opposite in Great Britain.
- **Secure and expand the railway system in Northern Ireland.** Particular consideration will be given to the creation of a rapid transit system in the Belfast Metropolitan Region.
- **Improve public transport,** through the increase in park and ride schemes, more dedicated bus lanes, cross-city bus routes, better integrated timetables, and more efficient fare collection systems.
- **Extend the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to a range of community groups with Small Bus Permits,** in line with England, Scotland and Wales.
- **Introduce free public transport for women aged 60–65.** Presently, this provision is for the over 65s, but women receive state pensions at age 60. This will need to be revised in line with an equalisation of the pension age.
- **Extend free travel to people with disabilities.** Mobility must be assured for all sections of the community. Public transport is a necessity for many people with disabilities and should be free and disability-friendly.
- **Improve the co-ordination of road works,** and boost the repair and maintenance of roads. Northern Ireland has a very extensive road network of almost 25,000 kilometres. We must not neglect our roads but ensure they are maintained to a high standard. Utilities and communication companies who dig up our roads must repair them to a satisfactory level.
- **Use new technology to manage traffic flows.**
- **Provide for residents-only parking schemes.** Too many residents, in and around busy city and town centres, have difficulty accessing their own properties due to all-day parkers.
- **Improve road safety,** through better education and more traffic calming measures. We will also improve street lighting and favourably amend the pedestrian crosswalks formula.
- **Reward those drivers who use low emission vehicles.**
- **Encourage a wider debate on ‘congestion charges’** and other forms of road pricing. Such initiatives would be consistent with the ‘polluter pays’ principle. However, motorists should not be so penalised until a proper public transport infrastructure has been put in place.

9. Supporting All in Our Society

As a united community, we must be able to live side-by-side with our neighbours, regardless of our nationality, class or creed. Alliance will provide more choices for people with mixed marriages, and for those with backgrounds outside Northern Ireland.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

Poverty and Social Inclusion

Alliance will fully implement integrated policies that target social exclusion. Such policies need to be based on improving income, employment, health and education.

- **Clarify and simplify benefit applications and procedures**, which will particularly improve the situation of our elderly population. Alliance will make the benefit system more transparent and accessible.
- **Ensure adequate funding for Citizens Advice Bureaux and other independent advice centres.** This is essential to help people disadvantaged by inadequate advice on social security, debt, housing and employment.
- **Improve provision for training**, to better advise those who are entitled to benefit schemes. This is to assist the training provided by charities and voluntary groups.

Women

Women are fully equal citizens in society, and Alliance is committed to redressing those issues that prevent them from being deemed as such. These matters include the facts that:

- The majority of low-paid workers are women.
- Reported incidents of domestic violence against women is increasing.
- The majority of the elderly poor are women.

Alliance pledges itself to—

- **Lobby for the provision of adequate pensions and a living minimum wage**, as well as further enforcement of the 1970 Equal Pay Act. Alliance also supports gender-based affirmative action programmes.
- **Ensure access to information and advice on health and fertility issues.**
- **Provide support to the network of crisis centres for women.**

Children

Alliance endorses the establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit, the Children's Commissioner, and the consultation for a Children's Strategy. We are committed to safeguarding and improving children's lives.

Alliance notes that:

- Few employers have family-friendly policies.
- Children's provision is inadequate in Northern Ireland.

Alliance pledges itself to—

- **Increase resources for parenting and family support.** This includes early intervention programmes, such as Sure Start and others, which promote better health, education, play and child development. We will create a singular advice and information line, to make it easier for parents to learn the range of support available.
- **Provide adequately resourced childcare provision.** There are successful childcare voucher and employer/employee tax incentive schemes that we will promote and implement with sufficient financing.
- **Improve educational outcomes for all children**, especially as a means of escaping poverty.
- **Ensure that children's rights are secured in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland**, entrenched as a named group. Of all in society, children's welfare must be the best protected.

9. Supporting All in Our Society

Young People

Young people are a vital part of our community. Our long-term aim of eliminating sectarianism is driven by the desire of enabling future generations to enjoy a better life. This requires respecting their dignity and enabling them to contribute positively to society.

- **Ensure a proper system of civic education.** (See separate manifesto section, 'Realising Potential through Education'.)
- **Encourage a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly,** which will enable young people to have a more direct and empowering relationship with government.
- **Lobby for the full minimum wage to be extended to those aged 16+.**

Carers

- **Provide recognition and financial support to carers,** who look after the welfare of their sick and dependent relatives.
- **Establish a respite care system** that is flexible, reliable and meets the needs of carers and those they care for.

Disability

Alliance believes that people with disabilities should have equal rights and opportunities within an inclusive society. They must be able to access mainstream services in all areas.

- **Improve the efficiency for Disability Living Allowance applications and appeals.**
- **Ensure all public transport vehicles are disability-friendly.**
- **Improve access to public facilities** for all disabled people. This will be achieved through comprehensive access policies.
- **Ensure the choice of mainstream education** is available for people with disabilities.
- **Create a strategy for serving the needs of people with learning disabilities.** This has already been done in Scotland and England.

Housing

Alliance will provide the leadership necessary for the Housing Executive to tackle the blight of paramilitary graffiti and flags, which contribute to hostile living environments for so many in Northern Ireland.

- **Break the cycle of homelessness,** by creating linkages between employment, health and social services.
- **Compel the Housing Executive to tackle the problem of unruly and disruptive tenants.** Alliance would also tackle the segregation that has resulted in housing.
- **Earmark resources for the Housing Executive to improve specialist accommodation** for older people and people with disabilities, single homeless persons and those with specialist needs.
- **Ensure adequate public funds to pay for housing arrears or repairs.** Alliance would not increase rents of those living in Housing Executive properties above the rate of inflation.
- **Allow those over 60 to buy existing Housing Executive bungalows.** We would also review the 'House Sales Scheme', to secure social housing provision.

10. Revitalising Our Culture, Arts and Leisure

Alliance believes the promotion of culture, arts and leisure are integral to the quality of life of every citizen, the building of community self-esteem, economic regeneration, and the projection of a positive image of Northern Ireland. Nurturing and harnessing creativity throughout the province is central to this process.

Alliance supports the appreciation and expression of our rich and varied cultural identities. We believe that cultural participation and self-expression should be developed in the context of respect and understanding of our own and others' heritage.

Alliance priorities for the next four years in the Assembly are to—

- **Increase the level of appreciation of, and participation in, arts, culture and leisure activities.** This will be based upon the principles of social inclusion and equality of opportunity.
- **Establish an integrated strategy for cultural tourism**—a full appreciation of the unique cultural heritage products we have to offer, how these can be developed, managed and projected to a wider audience. This can enhance Northern Ireland's image as a quality venue and destination.
- **Ensure that creative education is part of the schools curriculum**, as well as in all professional, vocational and academic courses.
- **Increase investment in the creative industries.** In conjunction with the Creative Enterprise Research Programme, we are committed to a co-ordinated approach, encouraging innovation and enterprise.
- **Support the appreciation and promotion of Cantonese, Irish and Ulster-Scots.** Alliance recognises the linguistic diversity within our community, and believes that all ethnic minority languages practiced in Northern Ireland deserve as much protection as indigenous languages.
- **Provide easier and more affordable access to museums, galleries and other places of interest**, for all socially excluded groups. We would make this a criteria for public funding for such places.
- **Enhance the Library Service.** We would adequately resource and publicise initiatives such as mobile libraries, which will particularly benefit older people and those living in rural areas.
- **Lobby for the Football Offences Act (1991)** and other relevant legislation to be extended to Northern Ireland, to deal with sectarian and racist chanting at local sports grounds.
- **Plan for a new sports stadium** for Northern Ireland that can be used for, amongst others, soccer, rugby and GAA games. Furthermore, this stadium could act as a home for a Belfast United football team.

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STABILITY

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open, free and fair society

equal citizenship

DIVERSITY

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