

Change Direction

Westminster Manifesto 2017



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Introduction from Naomi Long

Dear friend,

I love Northern Ireland. Despite our troubled past, we have started on a journey to a fairer, more progressive, more prosperous, and more outward-looking society. We are developing new opportunities, building on our historic record of achievements in science, industry, and the arts and harnessing the creativity and innovation of our people.



Yet, recently it feels like we're headed in a direction which doesn't reflect that ambition.

At Stormont, through deadlock and division, other parties are risking devolution, plunging our public services, such as health and education, into chaos and endangering our economy.

At Westminster, the Government is pursuing a recklessly hard Brexit, undermining how we live, learn, work and trade, and threatening the shared society that has been created under the Good Friday Agreement.

This is our chance to say 'enough is enough'.

This is our opportunity to tell Stormont and Westminster to turn away from the politics of division, towards politics that brings people together, celebrates diversity and offers hope.

That's my kind of politics.

I joined Alliance to change the direction of society, and in 2010 I was proudly elected the first Alliance MP.

In my five years as MP, I delivered the strong leadership needed to take Northern Ireland forward: towards open and transparent government and a vibrant and progressive community.

This election is our chance to move again in the direction of positive politics, with hardworking and visible MPs and constructive engagement with Europe and the world.

On June 8, vote Alliance.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Long

Leader, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

Change Direction

Five key commitments from Alliance

Brexit

Opposition to a hard Brexit, support for a referendum on the outcome of negotiations and delivery of a special deal for Northern Ireland.

- Opposing a hard Brexit for the United Kingdom – we will all be better off participating in the Single Market and Customs Union.
- Developing a special deal for Northern Ireland which recognises our unique circumstances.
- Securing a referendum so the people, rather than MPs, can decide if the final deal is better than membership of the EU.

Deadlock and Division

Restoring a working Assembly based on delivery, co-operation and mutual respect.

- Creating a new approach to devolution to ensure that, if one or two parties are holding up devolution, those who want to do the job have an opportunity to do so.
- Ending the abuse of the Petition of Concern.
- Requiring all Executive policies to be ‘shared-future proofed’ to ensure that all major decisions support a united society rather than continuing division.

Open Government

Open and transparent politics that delivers.

- Requiring parties to publish large political donations in Northern Ireland, as is already the case elsewhere and as Alliance do voluntarily.
- Reforming Westminster by allowing votes at 16, introducing PR elections for the House of Commons and directly electing the House of Lords.
- Delivering MPs who are committed to working for everyone in their constituency, celebrating the diversity of Northern Ireland.

Jobs and Public Services

Better healthcare, smarter education and investment in skills.

- Getting to grips with the challenges facing our health service by committing to reform so that we can invest in better treatment and outcomes.
- Reforming the education system so cuts to school budgets can be reversed.
- Working with the NI Executive to invest an additional £85m a year in skills.

Progressive Politics

A fairer society, integrating services and delivering social reforms.

- Developing a comprehensive approach to promoting a shared future, through prioritising integrated education, shared neighbourhoods and promoting community relations.
- Opposing any repeal of the Human Rights Act.
- Championing equal civil marriage for same-sex couples in Northern Ireland.

**OR CHANGE
DIRECTION
TOWARDS...**



**Positive
Progressive
Pro-Europe**

Vote Alliance

Brexit

Alliance supported the 'Remain' choice in the 2016 Referendum on the United Kingdom's continued participation in the European Union.

The referendum is now over and Article 50 has been triggered.

We maintain that any departure from the EU will have major economic, financial, social and environmental consequences for the UK, and diminish its global standing and influence. It will also create significant challenges for the European Union itself and the wider international system.

The impact on the Republic of Ireland, the island of Ireland and in particular Northern Ireland are set to be particularly difficult and, indeed, catastrophic in some respects.

If the UK is determined to leave the European Union, our preference is for the softest Brexit possible, including continued membership of the EU Single Market and adherence to the Four Fundamental Freedoms (around the freedom of movement of workers, goods, services and capital) and membership of the EU Customs Union and Common External Tariff.

As the issues outlined above will have a lasting impact on the UK, we favour a referendum on the detailed outcome of negotiations.

Alliance will continue to argue for special arrangements to be negotiated and put in place for Northern Ireland, and for this region to be accorded a special deal in terms of continued associate membership of the European Union, or a bespoke relationship with it. This outcome is not only necessary to protect the Good Friday Agreement, but also must be consistent with the principles and terms of that Agreement, including the Principle of Consent.

Impact on Northern Ireland

Alliance released a paper outlining our concerns regarding Brexit and its effect on Northern Ireland. This detailed analysis can be found at <https://allianceparty.org/document/latest/how-to-mitigate-the-impact-of-brexit-on-northern-ireland>. However, the following is a summary of our concerns:

Finance

In terms of finance, Northern Ireland is more dependent upon financial transfers from the EU than most other EU regions and it is unlikely that this resource could or would be replaced direct from the UK Treasury. This is particularly the case with agricultural support. Northern Ireland receives 10% of EU farm support into the UK, with just 3% of the population. Impacts could also be acute for the community and voluntary sector; universities; apprenticeships and other forms of training; and employment initiatives.

Alliance's Brexit Commitments

- Alliance will oppose a hard Brexit for the United Kingdom.
- Alliance wants any deal to recognise the special circumstances in Northern Ireland.
- Alliance will argue for a referendum so the public can choose between the final deal and remaining in the European Union.

Economics

Economically, Northern Ireland has been lagging behind the performance levels of most of the rest of the UK and, in some respects, the Republic of Ireland, due to a range of structural factors. While there has been an improvement in economic performance in recent years, the process of addressing these structural challenges is still at an early stage. Northern Ireland needs to have a greater level of economic transformation due to the legacy of violence and division.

In terms of the European Union, Northern Ireland is proportionately more dependent on exporting to the Single Market than Great Britain, reflecting in large part the level of existing economic integration on the island of Ireland.

Borders

There is a major concern in relation to any new physical border emerging either across the island of Ireland or along the Irish Sea. Unless we see the softest of soft Brexits, with the UK continuing to more or less fully participate in the EU Customs Union and Common External Tariff and preserve freedom of movement of people, there will be a difference between the trade and immigration regimes applying to the UK and to the Republic of Ireland. This will, therefore, need to be policed in some way. While there is a rhetorical commitment across all stakeholders about the desire not to introduce a hard-border on the island of Ireland, most experts believe that it is unavoidable. At present, the UK Government seems committed to taking control of immigration and freedom of movement issues, and leaving both the Single Market and Custom Union.

Political Implications

Brexit could undermine the Northern Ireland peace process and political stability. Northern Ireland remains a divided society. While significant progress has been made over the past 20 years in the peace process with the support of UK, Irish Governments and US Administration, fragilities continue which have been highlighted by the current political crisis.

While in the most literal sense, the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions may not be dependent upon the UK's or Republic of Ireland's continued membership of the European Union, the rights and privileges granted to people and companies under the EU facilitates the opportunities for freedom of movement and reformulation of individual identities upon which the Agreement is predicated.

Northern Ireland and its institutions rely on sharing and interdependence, but Brexit entails the erection of new barriers and divisions.

Policing and Security

A significant range of steps have been taken in recent years to build up policing, security and criminal justice co-operation on the island of Ireland and across the European Union that has been significantly assisted by the mutual membership of the EU by the UK and Republic of Ireland. The PSNI has made clear that such arrangements enable them to provide a quicker, more efficient and dynamic response to crime and criminality. The relevant measures include membership of Europol, access to the European Arrest Warrant, the biometric exchange programme, the Schengen Information System, joint investigative teams and European Investigation Orders. These arrangements have allowed the PSNI to deliver significant operations against international organised crime gangs in relation to child sexual exploitation, firearms and cyber-crime.

While alternative mechanisms could be put in place, there is a danger that these could be less efficient and effective than the current arrangements, and unlike current arrangements may incur a substantial cost for the PSNI.

Case for a Special Deal

A 'One-Size-Fits-All' Brexit will not work for the UK as a whole, nor for Northern Ireland in particular. However, the choice is not between advocating some form of special deal and accepting a one-size-fits-all Brexit. Rather the choice is between negotiating a special deal or bespoke set of arrangements, or simply seeing Northern Ireland becoming some form of anomaly.

While the effects of Brexit would be more severe upon Northern Ireland than any other region of the UK, there are a number of particular features that make this region a special case:

- Northern Ireland voted to Remain in the European Union in the referendum.
- People in Northern Ireland have an automatic right to be Irish citizens and, therefore, continue to be EU Citizens.
- Northern Ireland is a distinct political entity, with the right to determine its own constitutional status. Legally Northern Ireland would, post Brexit, have the capacity to opt back into the European Union through joining a united Ireland.
- Large aspects of our economy, for instance agri-food, are organised on a North-South basis.
- Agriculture and agri-food are much more important to Northern Ireland's economy than to the English economy, and our interests in this regard would not be accounted for in an overall UK approach to Brexit.
- The practical and political implications of where a physical border could be drawn and policed are significant.
- The threat to our political process and the corresponding need to protect the values and framework of the Good Friday Agreement are unique to Northern Ireland.

The deep political divisions in Northern Ireland have already been widened due to the Brexit vote. It is likely that any restored Executive is not going to be politically sustainable without a shared approach to mitigating the effects of Brexit which is facilitated by the UK Government, the Irish Government and the European Union.

What a Special Deal Would Look Like

Any special deal needs to be developed further over the coming weeks and months by governments, political parties, the business community, academia and civil society. The Northern Ireland Assembly, through an Alliance amendment, has already stated its support for continued participation in the Single Market.

A special deal could see Northern Ireland as a region remaining inside the European Union or outside with some form of special recognition, including potentially membership of the European Economic Area. A full spectrum of detailed options and scenarios should be considered.

For Alliance, a potential model for a special deal for Northern Ireland would include:

- Participation within Single Market.
- Participation within the Custom Union.
- Adherence to the Four Freedoms.
- Access to Structural and Competitive Funds.
- Rights to EU Citizenship for all born in Northern Ireland.
- Northern Ireland covered by EU regulations and Assembly control over EU Directives.
- The devolution model and balance of competencies otherwise continuing, with local taxes being paid to the UK Government; a UK Treasury financial subvention continuing; the UK Government handling non-EU foreign policy and defence.

A Referendum on the Terms of Any Deal

The question on the referendum ballot paper was a simplified binary choice about starting the process of withdrawal from the EU. However, at the time of the vote it was not clear what the outcome of the negotiations around Brexit would be – whether it would be soft or hard, what benefits would be available, or what the cost of leaving would be.

Furthermore, it is apparent that a Conservative Government will pursue the hardest form of Brexit. We do not believe that such a small majority in the referendum campaign provides a mandate for such an extreme form of Brexit.

As a result, we believe that the UK as a whole should have the opportunity to decide on the whether the deal is good enough; not just MPs. As a result, we believe that there should be a referendum with an explicit choice: the negotiated deal or membership of the European Union.

Legislation to Enact Any Brexit Outcomes

Alliance are deeply concerned about the white paper on the Great Repeal Bill and its heavy reliance on so-called ‘Henry VIII’ powers which will allow the UK Government to amend primary legislation by decree.

We acknowledge that on very discreet issues, some revising powers may be useful. However, they are never acceptable on such a scale that undermines the legitimacy of legislation passed by Parliament. We would not support such a Repeal Bill if its powers were wide enough to diminish the role and the primacy of the UK’s directly-elected Parliament.



Democratic Renewal

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

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

The significant flaws of the current system have been particularly exposed by the recent political deadlock. The stalemate between the largest two parties has led to the near-collapse of devolution, a budget crisis, and lack of support for our public services. Such a situation, where the two largest parties are able to veto the creation of a cross-community government, further reinforces the need for reform to permit a ‘coalition of the willing’ to proceed. In our current deadlock, this could allow devolved government to continue and avoid the imposition of ‘Direct Rule’.

Transforming Stormont

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

- Ending the process of community designation in the Assembly, and replacing it with a requirement for weighted majorities on defined key votes or in situations where a reformed Petition of Concern has been invoked.
- Reforming the Petition of Concern system. It should also be restricted to: matters of national identity; matters which relate to the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland; or matters which relate to the constitutional structure and institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement. While legislation for new arrangements is passed, we support a Protocol between the parties to prevent abuse of the Petition of Concern system in the interim.
- Creating a coalition decided through voluntary negotiation between parties and subject to a vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Collective responsibility must apply.
- Creating an opposition made up of parties who do not wish to enter the Executive. This opposition would be accorded additional rights to help them fulfil this job.
- Re-naming of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as “Joint First Ministers.” This would end what has become a potentially polarising contest over which party has a claim to First Minister and which party is “relegated” to deputy First Minister. The Executive Office should remain a joint office, in name and practice.
- Requiring greater co-operation between Ministers, including working together to agreed aims under law.
- Requiring all Executive policies to be ‘shared-future proofed’ to ensure that all major decisions support a united society rather than continuing or enhancing division.
- Modifying the exclusion mechanisms to more clearly define the highest standards of integrity with respect to the rule of law for parties holding office, and to prevent any party being able to veto sanctions against themselves.

These changes would allow us not only to have a cross-community government, but also one in which stalemate between parties does not either collapse the political institutions or prevent progress on economic or social issues.

A Changing Constitution

The consequence of the Scottish independence referendum will be a significant re-working of the British constitution, with more powers devolved from Westminster and across the various constituent parts of the UK. Alliance has consistently supported devolving power over public services to the lowest practical level.

As part of the process of constitutional change, Alliance believes there is an opportunity to move to a more durable constitutional settlement which supports devolution. We support a move towards a federal UK, retaining strong links with our European neighbours. In order to achieve this change across the UK we would:

- Support a UK-wide constitutional convention being held to determine the make-up of the constitution in light of these reforms. This should explicitly deal with the democratic deficit in England following devolution in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The convention should examine a wider range of issues in the British constitution, such as reform of the House of Lords.
- Repeal 'English votes for English laws' in Westminster. Our concerns are significant: complexities in deciding which areas are affected by a bill; the financial impact that many pieces of legislation have on Northern Ireland's block grant; concerns around English governance in the case of a 'split' election outcome in England rather than the rest of the UK; and concerns about an imbalance in the role of MPs from different parts of the UK.
- Retain a funding formula for Northern Ireland that properly reflects the structural problems in our economy and society, and adequately reflects local circumstances and needs.
- Continue to support the devolution of Corporation Tax. Any decision to lower the levels of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland must be accompanied by a clear and sustainable plan as to how this would be funded. The Executive must also commit to a linked increase in investment in skills, innovation and infrastructure to ensure any out-turn is maximised.
- Remain open to further tax-varying powers. We do not believe that the NI Executive has demonstrated the maturity for these to be devolved at this stage. Any revenue raised by these taxes should be retained by the Executive.
- Enable Northern Ireland to borrow similar proportions of money as Scotland and Wales without Treasury approval. The UK Government should be empowered to set the overall debt framework for the UK's public bodies.

Our Democratic Principles at Westminster

Just as Alliance stands for openness, honesty and fairness in Stormont, we will continue to do so in Westminster. We have always argued for reforms to make the political system more transparent and to ensure a constitutional settlement which is modern and sustainable. Alliance has supported a number of reforms that would have made democracy fairer. We will continue to support:

- A fairer electoral system for elections to the House of Commons. Our preferred system is multi-member STV, the system we use for all other elections in Northern Ireland.
- Amending the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (more commonly known as the Lobbying Bill) to ease restrictions on campaigning activities by affected organisations and to implement a comprehensive lobbying register.
- Votes at 16 for all elections and referendums.
- Direct elections to the House of Lords. Elected representatives could be elected by proportional representation from the 12 regions of the UK, including Northern Ireland.
- A written constitution for the UK which entrenches devolution. This should be developed by a significant Constitutional Convention.
- Letting the public know who donates money to political parties in Northern Ireland, building on the work Naomi Long did to ensure all donations from January 2014 will eventually be publically available. It is particularly important that, following the recent NIO consultation, this is a priority and covers all donations since January 2014.



Building an Integrated Society

Shared Future

For everyone – a shared future in Northern Ireland.

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

In particular, any borrowing the UK Treasury and Northern Ireland Executive embark upon to develop infrastructure must, where appropriate, prioritise sharing. For example, investment in new schools should prioritise the integrated sector, and investment in housing and regeneration should be linked to ensuring space is accessible to everyone in our community.

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

- Achieving 20% of children being educated in integrated schools within the next ten years.
- Making it law that the Housing Executive encourages and facilitates mixed housing.
- Requiring public bodies to promote shared space in new capital projects.
- Ceasing tolerance of illegally erected flags and emblems.
- Working with communities to secure the removal of 'peace walls'.
- Supporting a robust system for regulating parades which has cross-community support.
- Requiring Departments to review spending plans to identify the costs of managing a divided society in the next financial year.
- Passing a Single Equality Bill.
- Extending civil marriage provisions to same sex couples, with robust protections provided through legislation to protect faith groups and religious celebrants who do not wish to marry same-sex couples.
- Securing cross-party agreement on a mechanism for dealing with the past and legacy issues.
- Introducing an Irish Language Act as well as appropriate support for Ulster-Scots and non-indigenous minority languages.

Parades, Flags and Dealing with the Past

We believe that the peace process remains under threat as the result of other politicians being unable to come to agreement on tackling the controversial issues of parading, flags and the past. This has the potential to undermine public confidence in politics, in the Northern Ireland institutions, and on the peace process as a whole.

We are clear that these issues need to be settled. In recent years, issues around parading, the display of flags and how we deal with the legacy of the past have all caused significant problems or challenges. Reactions to these have also raised tensions within our community and been cited as a justification for public disorder.

Alliance will continue to work to:

- Develop, as part of the process set-out by the Stormont House Agreement, a model for parading and protesting which reduces sectarian behaviour, ensures the legitimacy of any new parading body and seeks local agreement as its first priority.
- Pursue the implementation of a 'designated days' policy for the flying of flags on each civic headquarters and a regulatory system for the flying of flags on lampposts.
- Support the full and timely implementation of sections of the Stormont House Agreement relating to commitments to deal with the legacy of the past. This agreement reflects many longstanding Alliance proposals. This package will finally offer the opportunity to deliver truth, justice and support services for victims and survivors.

Details on proposals regarding dealing with the legacy of the past can be found in the 'Crime, Security and Justice' section later in this manifesto.

Community Cohesion Across the United Kingdom

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

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

Human Rights and Equality

Human Rights

We recognise that human rights are inherent and universal. They are an essential part of modern governance and protect the individual, from any background, from injustices. They also provide sensible limits on governments and allow governments to plan in advance for these limitations.

As a consequence, Alliance is a strong supporter of the European Convention on Human Rights. We will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.

For Alliance any Northern Ireland Bill of Rights must be:

- Realistic and capable of being enforced through our own courts;
- Consistent with European and international standards;
- Flexible enough to take account of changing circumstances and an evolving Northern Ireland; and,
- Avoid entrenching any particular view of identity, such as the notion of two separate communities in Northern Ireland and, accordingly, sectarian divisions.

Equality

Alliance believes equality legislation, in particular the monitoring of outcomes, should properly reflect and respect the diversity of identities.

Equality policy is primarily devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is a matter of concern that no significant progressive reform to equality legislation has so far been passed under devolution: all the major reforms have occurred under 'Direct Rule'. This is not sustainable. While devolution creates a powerful regional dimension to policy-making, this should primarily relate to decisions regarding the allocation of resources to fit particular economic and social circumstances, rather than creating special rights regimes. Alliance believes that there should be the same standard of equality provisions throughout the United Kingdom. Alliance advocates the creation of a Single Equality Act for Northern Ireland.

This Act would harmonise existing equality and anti-discrimination measures and update and strengthen equality provisions. Our Act would also revise Fair Employment monitoring to better reflect the diversity of mixed and multiple identities within Northern Ireland. The introduction of the Equality Act (2010) in Great Britain means that in certain areas our legislation lags behind best practice and should be updated.

We have a wide range of proposals for promoting equality in Northern Ireland and would like to pursue them through the Northern Ireland Assembly. These can be found in our recent manifesto, which was released in February and is available online at: <https://allianceparty.org/document/manifesto/2017-assembly-manifesto.pdf>.

Migration

Immigration was a major feature of the recent Brexit debate. We were deeply concerned that some politicians used migrations as a populist, vote-getting device with little understanding or thought for the implications that rhetoric had on minority communities subsequently. That analysis is borne out by the significant evidence that racially-motivated abuse and attacks on migrants have increased since the referendum.

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

In addition, the UK Government is likely to seek to end freedom of movement of EU citizens into the United Kingdom (and vice versa). This has the potential for restricting the supply of labour in sectors where migrant workers are vital such as the health service and agriculture. It also potentially restricts highly-skilled workers in innovative and high-value industries from entering the labour market despite their skills and experience being demonstrably valuable to the UK's economy and tax base. Any immigration policy following Brexit must be responsive to those concerns.

Alliance will:

- Pursue a rational debate around immigration that emphasises facts and objective analysis.
- Guarantee the existing rights of EU citizens resident within the United Kingdom and the rights of UK citizens resident in the rest of the EU after Brexit.
- Ensure regional flexibility is built into immigration strategy so regions with different wage levels or particular skills needs are able to attract new labour where it is needed. Specifically, remove the cap on non-EU migrants as this has been detrimental to attracting high-skilled workers and students to British companies. Eligibility for migration must be on the basis of merit and demand for skills rather than an arbitrary cap.
- Make the visa system simpler and easier for legitimate sponsors to fulfil their role.
- Ensure that any immigration policy remains open to workers in sectors which will have significant difficulty in functioning without migrant workers, such as the health service, agriculture and scientific research.
- Exempt international students from being counted as migrants during the course of their studies.
- Provide a role for the Northern Ireland Executive in determining skills shortages for Northern Ireland in relation to Tier 2 visas, so that the needs of Northern Ireland's labour market are reflected in immigration policy.

The conflation of economic migrants and those seeking asylum is common practice and one which has allowed our obligations towards those seeking refuge to become mired in the wider debate around immigration. We recognise that asylum seekers are seeking to come to the UK for humanitarian rather than economic reasons and we have legal and moral duties to assist those fleeing war, severe hardship or persecution. Alliance will recognise this by:

- Continuing to argue that the UK should be a global leader and fully contribute to its international obligations to look after refugees and people fleeing persecution on the basis of political opinion, religion, sexual orientation and other grounds.
- Continuing to support the offering sanctuary to refugees from the Syrian Civil War, including unaccompanied children, and ensure that refuge is hosted across the UK.
- Ensuring that proper schemes of support are put in place in host communities to assist the integration of larger groups of people seeking refuge, and that investment in key services matches new pressures.
- Recommending the provision of asylum for unaccompanied children, under the terms of the so-called 'Dubs scheme'.
- Working with other European nations to reduce the dangers experienced by those attempting to cross the Mediterranean, both from natural elements and criminal exploitation.

Finance and Economics

The UK's Public Finances

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

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

Deficit Reduction

Alliance accepts the principle that the deficit should be reduced and that government should not regularly spend more than it raises in taxes. Whilst the UK Government has dropped its formal deficit reduction targets since the 2015 election, we anticipate some further spending restraint across the next Parliament. Alliance believes that any deficit reduction should be conducted fairly. Our values for measuring this are:

- Using both taxation and spending cuts as part of any further deficit reduction. International best practice demonstrates that a ratio of 1:2 is preferable and this should be the case for the Northern Ireland budget as well as the UK budget. We do not support budget consolidation based solely on cuts to public services and some form of progressive revenue-raising should be considered by the Northern Ireland Executive. This must include addressing evasion both by multinationals and high net worth individuals.
- Better parliamentary scrutiny of borrowing and public debt during the budget process. There should be a specific vote to authorise borrowing for non-emergency purposes in Parliament so that it is openly debated.

Fair and Progressive Taxation

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

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

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

- Any tax or revenue raised be done in the fairest and most progressive way possible so that the wealthiest people in society pay a bigger proportional share.
- Simplification of the payment and administration of income tax and national insurance.
- Increasing the tax-free allowance for income tax so that lower-earners keep more of what they earn.
- An evidence-based approach as to what the highest rate of tax should be.
- Consider the use of taxes which tackle inequality, such as on very high-value properties or changes to inheritance tax.
- A wider range of VAT exemptions, including zero-rating both sanitary products and sunscreen, and lower rates for hospitality and housing renovation.
- An international Financial Transactions Tax and, at a UK-wide level, retaining the banking levy.

Re-balancing the Economy

Modernising Our Economy

Northern Ireland has lost out as the result of a deeply unbalanced economy within the UK. There is a heavy focus around the south-east of England and those sectors which predominate there. For example, only 3/12 regions are net contributors to UK Treasury. Devolution should allow us to develop our own proposals for economic development, but it is important that those economic functions that remain with the UK Government should be exercised in a way that maximises economic development across the whole of the UK.

To achieve this, Alliance will:

- Support a UK Infrastructure Commission which will identify the most important long-term infrastructure needs for the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland, and examine the costs associated with them. This will ensure essential information is included in the debate about infrastructure.
- Seek to best use the current low cost of borrowing to finance an infrastructure and capital spending programme.
- Support regional industries by boosting research, skills, infrastructure and innovation across the entire UK.
- Support the development of broadband, high-speed mobile internet access and similar telecommunications projects in such a way that ensures all parts of the UK benefit from this technology. This will include a specific duty to roll out high-speed internet and telephony outside of large cities.
- Support a legal duty on the UK Government to ensure its economic policies are assessed on their likelihood of reducing regional inequality in the economy.

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

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

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

Role of Westminster in Supporting Local Economic Development and Trade

Alliance is heavily committed to developing the local economy in Northern Ireland. Our aim is to make Northern Ireland the most innovative and dynamic regional economy in Europe. However, to do this, we can no longer rely on what made us prosperous in the past. We must invest in the skills infrastructure and harness the creativity needed to ensure our economy is fit for the 21st Century. Improving our level of productivity is an essential part of any new economic approach.

Alliance believes that despite the challenges facing the economy, Northern Ireland has the resources to become stronger and more competitive. We have an enterprising and resilient business base; a youthful and well educated population; a strong manufacturing base; excellent research and innovation attributes; a world class telecommunications network; strong international links; and unique natural and cultural resources. Our strengths far outweigh our weaknesses. Taking advantage of these strengths will create the right conditions for growth and address many of the weaknesses in our economy.

There is a role for Westminster in the development of this and Alliance MPs will work alongside the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that we develop the economy across Northern Ireland.

We are also clear that the best option for increasing trade for Northern Ireland's businesses is for the UK as a whole to retain membership of both the EU Single Market and the Customs Union. Our European partners are a considerable trading partner for us and we already have full, negotiated access to the Single Market and the Customs Unions and the EU has a significant ability to negotiate further international deals. However, we will work with the new Department for International Trade to ensure that any trade deals are appropriate for Northern Ireland.

In order to promote economic development and trade, we will:

- Continue to support the devolution of Corporation Tax. Any decision to lower the levels of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland must be accompanied by a clear and sustainable plan as to how this would be funded. The Executive must also commit to a linked increase in investment in skills, innovation and infrastructure to ensure any out-turn is maximised.
- Work with the UK Government and Invest NI to ensure that any trade deals struck following Brexit reflect the business environment in Northern Ireland and enable local businesses to be involved trade missions.
- Work to retain 'passporting' for financial services in the event of a special deal for Northern Ireland following Brexit, allowing Northern Ireland to attract key financial services.
- Argue for changes to UK-wide procurement rules that make it easier for small businesses to bid. Examples include: improving information available to applicants, tackling the complexity of the process and reducing the 'bundling' of procurement contracts.
- Ensure economic policy is assessed for its impact on small businesses.

Air Connectivity

Air transport in Northern Ireland faces unique challenges because of geography and the range of flights available from Northern Ireland. In order to compete with other regions of Europe, air connectivity needs to be improved: otherwise businesses and travellers will face additional costs or fewer services. Alliance will:

- Argue to remain part of a single regime for European air transport following Brexit.
- Support the reduction or abolition of Air Passenger Duty across the UK. This tax disproportionately affects Northern Ireland due to the need for reliance on air transport to reach UK cities.
- Advocate for an early decision, within the first year of the next Parliament, on airport capacity in the south-east of England. We will also push for decision to recognise the need for an international airport 'hub' in the UK and for any expansion to take account of the specific needs of business exports, such as cargo capacity and connectivity.
- Work with governments, airports and airlines to increase the range of both direct flights and connections available to passengers from Northern Ireland.
- Invest in better public transport links from our local airports.



Science, Skills and Innovation

Alliance believes that the future of the economy will be based on securing high-tech, highly innovative and highly-skilled jobs. In the 2011-16 Northern Ireland Executive, Alliance Minister Stephen Farry invested heavily in universities and skills.

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

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

- Increasing investment in science and research through the UK Research Councils. There is a clear link globally between state investment in science and economic prosperity.
- Supporting Northern Ireland's universities in drawing down greater levels of science and research funding from both the Research Councils and the European Union.
- Auditing how scientific infrastructure is lacking in the UK and ensure this is considered as part of the UK's scientific investment programmes.
- Specifically identify where gaps exist in both funding and infrastructure for science in Northern Ireland.
- Investing in a wide range of programmes to assist young people in gaining appropriate skills and working with specific industries where appropriate.
- Ensuring that any immigration system implemented after Brexit enables those who are highly-skilled in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and related disciplines to continue to migrate to the UK to work.

Employment Law

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK to which employment law and employment relations policy and practice is devolved.

While taking into account developments in Great Britain and the need on occasions for a common framework and approach, we have the capacity to shape employment law and relations policy to take account of the particular circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Alliance supports a collaborative approach across stakeholders including, in particular, business organisations and trade unions, to preserve generally harmonious relations in the workplace and to shape further changes in the law and future practice.

We are conscious of the need to make the process of resolving disputes less onerous and time-consuming for employers, and making it easier for employees to address problems. We do not believe that these objectives are contradictory.

Alliance believes in a hierarchy of interventions to address grievances and complaints in the workplace, starting with the dissemination of advice on good practice in order to prevent disputes, through the use of a range of methods of alternative dispute resolution with, ultimately, the option of accessing a tribunal remaining available. Alliance will:

- Ensure continued NI Assembly competence in this area. This is especially important in the context of Brexit and Great Repeal Bill.
- Continue our record of opposing illiberal Trade Union legislation.

Crime, Security and Justice

Security and Liberty

Policing and Security Matters

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

In order to ensure this, Alliance will:

- Argue for UK participation in the European Arrest Warrant following Brexit.
- Work with the National Crime Agency, PSNI, and police forces across Europe to ensure international policing co-operation in the event of Brexit.
- Further reduce delay in court cases, including the introduction of statutory time limits in youth cases.
- Continue our strong opposition to domestic and gendered violence.
- Promote collaborative efforts to tackle global crimes which require an integrated national and international response. These include: human trafficking, fuel laundering and counterfeiting. We recognise that the profits from these crimes fund illegal organisations locally and globally.

Civil Liberties

Alliance is committed to personal liberty, privacy and civil rights. We believe that these help to ensure that individuals are able to exercise their own choices and that the state acts fairly. As a party which respects the rule of law, we know how important it is to ensure civil liberties are protected. In order to do so, Alliance will:

- Continue to apply an approach to the most difficult issues in Northern Ireland which balances civil liberties and human rights.
- Oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Support reviewing the effectiveness of mass data surveillance and its implications on privacy, especially given the lack of a need for a warrant when acquiring this information, with a view to restricting significantly the scope of the Investigatory Powers Act.
- Support the principle of net neutrality and an opposition to wide-ranging restrictions on access from the UK to certain parts of the internet.
- Support the retention of the Freedom of Information Act in its current form. We will also look to see how it can be further improved particularly in light of NI experience.
- Propose the establishment of a statutory Civil Liberties Forum to advise government on issues around civil liberties and human rights.

Media Reform

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

That is why Alliance will:

- Support the implementation of the proposals from the Leveson report, specifically around a statutory replacement for the Press Complaints Commission.
- Support the passage of legislation equivalent to the Defamation Act by the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Oppose overly-stringent reforms to the Official Secrets Act which impinge on freedom of the press.

Delivering Truth and Justice for Legacy Victims

Alliance has long advocated a new approach to dealing with the legacy of Northern Ireland's past. Alliance refused to support the "Fresh Start" Agreement because it failed to deliver for victims, and remains committed to establishing and supporting all of the legacy institutions proposed in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement.

Alliance proposed the principles set out in that agreement which should guide the Executive and the British and Irish governments as they deal with the past, as follows:

- Promoting reconciliation.
- Upholding the rule of law.
- Acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims and survivors.
- Facilitating the pursuit of justice and information recovery.
- Complying with human rights.
- Be balanced, proportionate, transparent, fair and equitable.

Any legislation on these matters will be taken forward by Westminster. Alliance will work with other parties to establish the following institutions and services:

- An Oral History Archive to provide the opportunity of a central place for people from all backgrounds (and from throughout the UK and Ireland) to voluntarily share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles. The Archive will be independent and free from political interference, and be complemented by a factual historical timeline and statistical analysis of the Troubles, produced by academics.
- The delivery of high quality services for victims and survivors, respecting choice and need, and including comprehensive mental trauma services, a pension for severely physically injured victims, and access to advocate-counsellor assistance.
- A new, independent, Article 2 compliant, Historical Investigations Unit to take forward investigations into outstanding Troubles-related deaths, including outstanding cases from the Historical Enquiries Team process and the legacy work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.
- An Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the Troubles-related deaths of their next of kin. This Commission would not disclose the identities of people who provide information. No individual who provides information to the body will be immune from prosecution for any crime committed should the required evidential test be satisfied by other means.

- An Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG) to oversee themes, archives and information recovery, with the promotion of reconciliation underpinning all of its work. The IRG would encourage and support other initiatives that contribute to reconciliation, better understanding of the past and reducing sectarianism.
- Resolving the issue of On-the-Runs in a transparent manner that provides justice. We have proposed a tribunal-style system that takes place in public.

The Implementation and Reconciliation Group was an Alliance Party proposal, based on our analysis that the process of dealing with the past will inevitably involve exposing or reopening many wounds and cause disruption and even renewed trauma for many. Alliance therefore argued, and continues to argue, that it is vital that a space is created which is formally part of the structures to deal with the past and which has the capacity to respond to issues resulting from the investigations or information recovery.

Alliance believes the IRG should fulfil a number of critical functions:

- First, it would have an oversight role, monitoring the implementation of the other aspects of the institutions for dealing with the past; issuing annual reports on progress and highlighting where additional or corrective action is required. Additionally, the IRG would engage informally with the governments and the Northern Ireland Executive on an ongoing basis to ensure sufficient progress is being made.
- Second, recognising that the evidence to prompt a thematic analysis could emerge from a number of different processes, including the Investigations Unit, the Information Recovery Unit and the Oral History Archive, the IRG would be asked to identify and analyse themes arising from any and all of the elements of the package of measures.
- Third, it would play a crucial role in facilitating reconciliation. While a comprehensive approach to securing truth and justice in relation to the past is an important step on the path to a fully shared and reconciled society, it will not in itself achieve that reconciliation. Indeed, the process of securing truth and justice will inevitably involve exposing or reopening many wounds. It is, therefore, vital that a space is created, which is formally part of the structures to deal with the past, which will examine and reflect on the emerging themes arising from these structures, and the substantial body of academic study on the divisions within Northern Ireland and beyond that are a legacy of the Troubles. That legacy includes divisions in attitudes and in Northern Ireland's education, housing, and planning provision. Based on its examination and reflections the IRG would make recommendations to the two governments and the Northern Ireland Executive regarding further actions that it considers would assist in progressing reconciliation and the objective of a shared community.



Welfare and Pensions

Welfare Reform

Alliance did not support the Welfare Reform Act, which drastically reduced benefits for a whole range of people. As an MP, Naomi Long strenuously opposed this legislation. We have always recognised that Northern Ireland is not in a financial position to refuse to implement these changes once agreed by Westminster. The imbalance between higher benefit claimant rates and lower employment levels locally, preclude a separate Northern Ireland benefits system being affordable or sustainable. We have, therefore, always been realistic about making affordable changes to the benefits system to address the worst aspects of the reforms and ensure that it is fairer than the system used for the rest of the UK but within our funding ability.

Welfare reform has now been implemented in Northern Ireland, with the exception of a few areas where the Executive parties were able to agree a series of mitigation measures. However, the Conservative Government has already indicated it is likely to continue to bring forward cuts to the welfare budget at a UK level.

Voting at Westminster on Welfare Reform

We will continue to argue for a fairer UK-wide benefits system as this will have the greatest impact on what we are able to afford in Northern Ireland. We base our approach to the welfare system on the principles of support for the most vulnerable in society, simplicity for the recipients of payments, the need to tackle poverty, and ensuring that potential “benefit traps” are eradicated.

Alliance will support repeal of:

- The bedroom tax.
- Onerous obligations being placed on people who are in receipt of benefits.
- The ending of payment of housing benefit directly to landlords.
- The removal of child tax credits for third (and subsequent) children, which would also end the repugnant ‘rape clause’.
- The recent changes to bereavement benefits.

Alliance will also oppose:

- Plans to strip young people aged 18 to 21 of housing benefit or lower rate of benefits for younger people.
- Any further lowering of the welfare cap.
- Onerous cuts to disability benefits.
- Significant reductions in the number of people eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment.

As a minimum, we will also make the following changes to the welfare system:

- An easier process for scrutiny and transparency of any private companies responsible for medical assessments for welfare by both legislation and procurement.
- A significant reduction in the number, scale and use of benefit sanctions, the introduction of more stringent requirements before a sanction is considered, and the development of a 'yellow card' system which would allow recipients the opportunity for an explanation.
- Reform of welfare assessments so that people with lifelong, permanent or deteriorating conditions do not need regular re-assessment.
- A wide-range of opportunities for recipients to re-skill or re-train.

Financial Support for Children and Older People

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

Children

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

- Supporting the continued dual-provision of childcare vouchers and childcare payments, ensuring both are available to new applicants.
- Increasing the tax-free allowance for childcare and the number of hours of free childcare available.
- Encouraging the Northern Ireland Executive to promote the uptake of UK-wide child care schemes by citizens in Northern Ireland.
- Advocating a refreshed childcare strategy which ensures the annual budget is spent well, encourages the growth of Sure Start centres, and promotes wraparound care and other flexible options.
- Acknowledging the additional challenges for parents of twins and other multiple births and providing additional support.
- Restoring a UK-wide target on reducing child poverty.

Carers

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

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

Pensions

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

- Retaining the triple lock on the state pension; ensuring an annual uplift linked to inflation, prices and earnings: whichever is the highest.
- Providing transitional support to those women who have been affected by the decision to bring the date of the increase in the women's retirement age forward, in line with the WASPI campaign.
- Taking independent, objective analysis on the issue of the national pension liability, age of eligibility and how this affects long-term funding arrangements. We will continue to support automatic enrolment into workplace pensions. We have supported recent changes to ensure that private pensions will be offered to all employees in the next few years.

The government is also responsible for providing pensions to its employees. As a result of the recent financial situation, there have been a number of changes to public sector pensions.

Alliance will seek to balance the need for sustainable finances with the need to ensure people have a dignified retirement and time to adjust to any necessary changes in their pension provision.

Funding Health and Social Care

Alliance believes that social care should be free at the point of access, funded by collective investment through the welfare state. This is the same for other examples of ongoing treatment of long-term conditions. The cost of this should be borne by progressive taxation and not regressive charges.

We will oppose any proposals to fund social care which are not fair and progressive. We will also work to deliver improvements in the health service so that investment can be directed towards social care.

Given the growing pressure within social care systems, we acknowledge that there will be difficulty in funding social care in Northern Ireland in the future. As a result, these proposals could impact health and social care provision in Northern Ireland.

In the main, health and social care are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, due to the way that public services in Northern Ireland are funded, there could be an effect on our budget through the Barnett formula. This is especially relevant given the Conservative's proposals to introduce a green paper on the funding of social care in England.



Sustainability and the Environment

Climate Change

Alliance is a pro-environment party. We acknowledge that man-made climate change is real and has potentially disastrous consequences for human existence, consequences which are already being experienced by some of the most fragile life forms and most vulnerable people on earth. It is essential that all regions, and nations, work together to reduce carbon emissions and develop solutions that will mitigate the impact of climate change. Our approach to these issues needs to be threefold. Firstly, we need to switch to less polluting forms of energy production and reduce consumption. Secondly, we need to work to mitigate the impact of climate change. And thirdly, we need to ensure there is a legal framework that embeds environmentalism at the heart of government thinking.

Climate change is a global issue and needs consistent commitment from both the UK Government and the NI Executive in order to ensure progress is made against our international commitments. To begin with, we support the development of robust global agreements against climate change which will need to be entered on a UK-wide basis. UK-wide developments on innovation and research will also feed through to Northern Ireland. Finally, many of the tax and policy mechanisms which allow us to mitigate against climate change remain at a UK level.

Energy

Although many of the powers over energy development and procurement are devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive, renewable energy is a matter which needs to be championed by Northern Ireland's MPs. Alliance's view on this is simple – we need a varied mix of renewable energy sources contributing to our energy supply. Northern Ireland has an incredible opportunity in this regard: we have the second highest potential for energy generation through wind in Europe, as well as significant opportunity for tidal, biomass and geothermal energy production.

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

- Support the continued existence of the all-island energy market. This market is under significant threat from Brexit and any curtailing of it would create significant problems for electricity supply in Northern Ireland.
- Scrutinise every UK-wide energy package to ensure it prioritises renewable energy and acts to keep prices as low as possible.
- Work with the NI Executive and the relevant UK Departments to create a long-term, 40-year energy strategy covering all forms of renewable energy, which provides a clear 'road map' toward addressing the challenge.
- Support research funding and revenue streams which promote innovation in renewable energy.

Mitigation

Sadly, the impacts of climate change are already upon us. We are experiencing changing and variable weather and climate patterns, increases in flooding, changes in the natural environment, habitats and biodiversity within these islands, and bringing a financial cost to the Treasury of addressing these and related problems.

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

- Establish robust evidence-gathering and reporting on the impact of climate change so that policy development has full regard of the facts.
- Develop the 'polluter pays' principle further, so that the burden of dealing with pollution is carried primarily by those who are responsible for creating that pollution. A link between taxes on pollution and clean-up efforts will help reduce the initial environmental impact.
- Abolish VAT on all renovations and repairs to existing buildings so that houses can be repaired and refurbished at a lower cost.
- Undertake complete audits of the existing UK flooding infrastructure to establish what areas need priority investment; either improving or constructing defences.
- Work to place flood insurance subvention on a more reliable footing.

Climate Change Framework

We believe that governments of all levels across the world will need to ensure that they have the correct processes in place for addressing the challenges of climate change. To this end, Alliance supports:

- Continued strengthening of the international framework for tackling climate change, beginning with the fullest implementation of the Paris Agreement and the future work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Implementing binding and stringent carbon emissions targets for the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government, codified in legislation with interim targets.
- Imposing a duty on the various governments to reduce the carbon emissions from their own building stock and to produce 'green buildings' guidance for the public sector.

Agriculture, Animals and Nature

Both the agriculture and fishing industries face challenges relating to falling prices paid for their produce. The most obvious and recent example of this has been the milk 'gate price' falling below the cost of production, although this situation is not unique to the dairy industry. To tackle this, we will:

- Assist farmers and fishermen to work co-operatively to market produce together in order to get the best market price.
- Give the supermarket ombudsman a more pro-active role to include enforcement of large fines to tackle poor prices for all farmers. In many cases, the prices paid are below costs of production.
- Push for an enhancement to the UK's Groceries Code Adjudicator to strengthen the role.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a significant part of the Northern Ireland economy and plays a crucial role in both our economy and in countryside management. In rural areas, local economies and identities can be strongly focussed on farming.

The proposed UK withdrawal from the European Union creates a period of deep uncertainty for Northern Ireland's farmers. It is not yet clear what will happen to agricultural support, nor whether farmers will have the same level of market access to sell their produce.

In addition, we have received no guarantees that current EU powers over agriculture will be devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, nor that we will receive the current proportional share of UK agricultural funding that is spent in Northern Ireland. A 'perfect storm' of these factors could have a significantly damaging impact on Northern Ireland's farmers. The collapse of the previous Executive means that many of these issues have been left unaddressed. Alliance believe that supporting our farmers is an imperative for the Executive.

We will push for the following to be implemented by the UK Government:

- Securing membership of the Customs Union, ensuring our largest customers do not see price rises as a result of tariffs. This is essential for agricultural exports.
- Ensuring UK farming and agricultural output is not undermined by lower standard imports following any trade deals.
- Ensuring that immigration policy means that there is labour available for work on farms and in food processing.
- Pushing for any UK-wide agricultural funding to recognise that farming and agri-food are much bigger as a proportion of the economy of Northern Ireland than the UK as a whole.
- Supporting mechanisms that minimise disruption to the North-South supply chains in agri-food and maximise potential for sales into the Great Britain, EU, and international markets.
- Allowing the NI Assembly to continue to have control over agriculture and associated environmental legislation

It is our firm belief that agricultural support should be devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and we will strongly advocate for this following Brexit. We will push for any agricultural policy to:

- Ensure that a small proportion of Northern Ireland's agricultural support funding is used for rural development projects and support schemes including: agri-food support; improving farm safety; tackling disease control; supporting innovation and research in rural businesses; and, promoting sustainability.
- Direct a greater proportion of resources to farmers who operate environmentally sustainable farming methods and assisting farmers to develop micro-generation on their land.
- Discourage over-farming of areas, especially upland areas.
- Discourage land abandonment.
- Target a proportion of rural development money at creating rural employment through renewing and maintaining our agricultural heritage of agricultural buildings, and bringing these up to standard as either tourist accommodation or for rural business use.

Alongside these proposed financial reforms, we will support agriculture by:

- Implementing a regulatory framework which emphasises quality of production, including around animal welfare and the use of antibiotics.
- Supporting the continuation of the EU's geographical indicators for food products, including Northern Ireland's products, after Brexit. These indicators already provide recognition for Irish whiskey and Loch Neagh eels and there are other products which could benefit from this.
- Continuing to implement "Going for Growth" – the strategic action plan for agri-food. This will include developing partnerships between producers, retailers and government to maximise the potential of supply chains, and working to reduce costs and securing investment for the infrastructure needed to develop jobs in the supply chain.
- Promoting innovation, particularly that which encourages grass-fed food production.

A wider view of agricultural policy is available in our 2017 Assembly manifesto, which was released in February and is available online at:

<https://allianceparty.org/document/manifesto/2017-assembly-manifesto.pdf>.

Fishing

As with agriculture, fishing is a major industry in many communities. It also faces a series of changes as a result of the proposed withdrawal from the EU. Any replacement for the EU fishing regime must be decided locally in Northern Ireland and ensure that the fishing industry is sustainable, both environmentally and in terms of maintaining stocks for future generations. We will ensure that UK fishing policy:

- Supports the fishing industry in moving towards more sustainable methods of catching fish.
- Develops a method of deciding fish quotas which is flexible and efficient.
- Incorporates long-term, regional stock management plans to ensure that fish stocks remain at sustainable levels.
- Retains the ban on 'discards,' which results in dead fish being put back into the sea.

Nature, Wildlife and Biodiversity

Part of the environmental challenge that we face is restoring biodiversity and ensuring that nature is not unduly affected by climate change. This is as much a part of our environmental responsibility as reducing climate change. Lower levels of biodiversity and higher levels of habitat destruction profoundly affect our ecosystem.

We will support biodiversity by:

- Protecting all existing EU environment directives by placing them into Northern Ireland's domestic law following the proposed withdrawal from the EU.
- Encouraging the development and funding of programmes to restore wildlife and biodiversity. Where appropriate, this would include an all-island approach to wildlife management.
- Implementing the EU Birds and Habitats Directive into domestic law following the proposed withdrawal from the EU.
- Ensuring maximum opportunities to protect and restore our wetlands by ensuring conservation laws at least as strong as the Water Framework Directive. Ongoing investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure is also required.
- Supporting UK-wide legislation to improve decision making around nature issues and to establish long-term targets and powers to meet them.

Animal Welfare

Alliance has always prioritised animal welfare and sought to tackle cruelty against animals. People who show such barbarism are not only a danger to the animals involved, but potentially to our society as a whole. Naomi Long has received awards for her work on this and will continue to advocate for animal welfare in many different ways. Our priorities for animals in the agriculture sector include:

- Improving food labelling and traceability through proposals to label meat as either stunned or non-stunned, mandatory CCTV in slaughter-houses, and cracking-down on overuse of antibiotics in farming.
- Recognising the economic impact of Bovine TB on the farming community and the need for science- and evidence-based procedures to eradicate the disease. We oppose area-based badger culling as we do not believe it is proven to be effective or humane and has led to increases in Bovine TB outside the cull area. We would support research into the cause and transmission of Bovine TB and the effectiveness of 'trapping and testing' as well as more cost-effective versions of cattle vaccinations. We would especially work to remove barriers to cattle vaccination within the EU Single Market.
- Opposing the live export of animals.

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

- A UK-wide ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.
- Opposition to any attempts to repeal the Hunting Act 2004 and supporting its extension to Northern Ireland.
- Increased powers for local authorities (including in Northern Ireland) to deal with issues around horse abandonment such as fly-grazing.
- Using the UK's global influence to end 'trophy hunting' and the trade of illegal animal products.
- Outlawing the use of snares.
- Better regulation of the sale of puppies and kittens, especially when sold on the internet or in pet shops.
- Working to reduce and better regulate necessary animal testing and invest in developing alternative scientific methods and practices.
- Bringing the rest of the UK into line with Northern Ireland's enhanced sentencing for animal cruelty, introduced by Alliance Minister David Ford.

Our priorities for better regulation of owners of animals include:

- Micro-chipping and registration of cats on the same basis as for dogs.
- Improving information-sharing between animal welfare charities and statutory organisations in order to ensure that people who are banned from keeping domestic animals are prevented from doing so.
- Improving the enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act by deploying more animal welfare officers.
- Improving information-sharing between animal welfare charities and statutory organisations in order to ensure that people who are banned from keeping domestic animals are prevented from doing so.

Foreign Affairs

Defence and the Armed Forces

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

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

Trident (the nuclear deterrent)

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

Conflict Resolution

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

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

Support for The Armed Forces

Alliance respects and values the difficult work that the men and women in our armed forces undertake. That is why we believe several changes need to be made to ensure that they are properly remunerated and rewarded for their efforts. This should include:

- An audit of the equipment provided to the armed forces to ensure that they are properly equipped for the various types of mission that they face. This audit should ensure appropriate equipment for newer types of deployment such as counter-insurgency and peace-keeping.
- Supporting the full implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Northern Ireland, including regular monitoring of the scheme and individual Executive Departments reporting to the UK Government for inclusion in annual reports.

Promoting our Values Abroad

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

International Development and Global Prosperity

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

- Maintain the commitment to spend 0.7% of the UK's gross national income on international development and retain this commitment in law.
- Tackle international tax-dodging which harms the economies of both the UK and the developing world. We will ensure that the UK's tax rules do not have a negative effect on developing countries.
- Assist developing countries to strengthen their own tax collection systems.
- Support the creation of a register requiring the publication of company ownership information in the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This would ensure financial transparency and reduce the use of tax havens.
- Assist developing countries to move 'from aid to trade'. This assistance would include: improving access to international markets, supporting the development of smallholder farms and small business, and expanding Fair Trade initiatives.
- Support greater investment in water, sanitation and hygiene as a matter of priority. This not only reduces disease and improves sanitation, but can help prevent the development of new diseases with a global threat, as well as impacting directly on economic growth and inclusion. Its impact on the safety, security, education, economic and social participation of women and girls is also hugely significant.
- Develop the 'polluter pays' principle further so that the burden of dealing with pollution is carried by those who are responsible for creating it.

- Support a global climate change fund to help ensure that poorer countries can mitigate the impact of climate change. Climate change is disproportionately caused by industrialised nations so we should assist other nations to adapt to it. This agenda needs to have accountable implementation and be supported by a global agreement on climate change.
- Support delivery of the post-2015 Development Programme, the successor to the Millennium Development Goals. We recognise the role the UK has played in the Millennium Development agenda but regret that a number of targets have not been met. The post-2015 targets must be both achievable and ambitious. These goals should include specific targets for women, including eradicating gendered violence and promoting access to both education and decision-making, tackling in-country inequality and investment in programmes that improve maternal health and the reduce of child mortality.

Supporting Human Rights and Political Freedoms

Alliance is a party which respects and promotes human rights, civil liberties and political freedom. We believe that these issues are universal and must be respected by governments across the world. We will always seek to promote our values abroad, promoting a world which is tolerant, respects human rights and supports political freedom. Alliance will:

- Continue to promote our unwavering commitment to freedom of, and from, religion across the world and opposing discrimination on the basis of religion or belief.
- Recognise that civil liberties and the rule of law are a crucial part of developing stable governments and enabling economic growth, and ensure this recognition is embedded in foreign affairs.
- Pay particular attention to protecting the rights and well-being of women across the world, given that women are typically financially and politically disadvantaged in comparison to men. Access to education is a priority.
- Promote LGBTI+ rights across the world.
- Use the UK's role in the Commonwealth to make progress on protecting the rights of women, religious minorities and LGBTI+ people.
- Strengthen the role the international community plays in overseeing elections abroad so that we can continue to promote fair and free elections.
- Promote Northern Ireland's experience in replacing conflict with democracy to those regions of the world where this might be applied. Most notably this could include Israel-Palestine, where we support a negotiated two-state solution.
- Continue to support the fight against slave labour and human trafficking, and advocate for the end of UK support for arms sales to countries engaged in these activities.

Supporting Stormont to Deliver

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

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

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

The 2017/18 Budget

The timing of this election comes at a particularly bad point in the cycle of government decision-making.

Even beyond the wider failures of this Executive, the DUP and Sinn Fein have not agreed a Programme for Government, an Economic Strategy, a Social Strategy, Investment Strategy, or a Budget for the 2017/18 Financial Year. Even if the institutions had not collapsed, there appeared to be little prospect of a Budget being agreed by the DUP/SF Executive.

Beyond the missed opportunity for a more strategic use of resources in the context of tightening public expenditure, in this particular situation there is a question regarding the scope for basic budget decisions to be taken. There is also real risk to the quality of public services and the capacity to see a transformation in the economy.

In particular, the current approach to the health service is not sustainable, and the need for both additional funding and reform to ensure our health service not only survives but thrives is very urgent. In the absence of progress, it is likely that there will be increasingly significant impact on patients and further deterioration in health outcomes.

There is a considerable risk of substantial damage being caused to Northern Ireland from this situation.

The emergency stop-gap budget-setting measures set out in the Northern Ireland Act (1998) are untested and seem inadequate. These interim decisions come too late and won't allow for effective forward and strategic planning, thereby compromising the effective deployment of already scarce resources. They may also postpone any decisions on discretionary spending, with a particular impact on the community and voluntary sector in which many staff have already been placed on protective notice or have been made redundant.

Setting a budget is the most important and most fundamental action that any government takes. As a result, Alliance will advocate that the Secretary of State puts emergency legislation through Westminster to reform the Northern Ireland Act to provide more scope and flexibility in terms of the default mechanisms for budget setting, in order to minimise the damage to the economy and society from political deadlock.

Delivering Change

We have a programme for significant reform of Northern Ireland, including reform of public services and economic investment. We believe our proposals, which would be delivered by a reformed Northern Ireland Executive and restored Northern Ireland Assembly, will change the direction of Northern Ireland; helping to change our politics into something honest, open, responsible, respectful and hard-working.

These plans can be found in detail in our recent Assembly manifesto, which was released in February and is available online at: <https://allianceparty.org/document/manifesto/2017-assembly-manifesto.pdf>.

Below are some of our priorities for Stormont, taken from that manifesto.

Good Relations

- Creating a shared future has not progressed quickly enough, with the DUP and Sinn Fein failing to implement many of their own proposals on this issue. **We will develop a comprehensive approach to promoting a shared future, through prioritising integrated education, shared neighbourhoods and promoting community relations.**
- The Executive Office and its predecessor OFMDFM, run by the DUP and Sinn Fein, has not introduced a single piece of equality legislation since 2007. **We will introduce a Single Equality Bill to overcome the lack of progress on equality legislation and bring protections in Northern Ireland up to date.**
- 22 years after the ceasefires and 18 years after the Good Friday Agreement, all illegal organisations should have long ceased to exist. **We will pursue a robust Executive-wide strategy to tackle all paramilitary and organised crime groups.**

Good Prospects

- Access to European markets is essential to the economy of Northern Ireland. It provides us with a huge market for our products and is particularly important for business that trade across the island of Ireland. **We will campaign for the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland to be recognised through a Special Status which would include remaining in the EU's Single Market and Customs Union in Brexit negotiations.**
- Northern Ireland's economy is still held back by political deadlock and disagreement. **We will create a robust inter-departmental economic strategy which focuses on job creation and growth.**
- Even though a rate for corporation tax has been agreed, there has been no agreement on how we will improve skills in order to maximise this opportunity. **We will invest at least an additional £85 million each year in skills.**

Good Services

- Despite over-subscribed schools and public support for integrated education, education in Northern Ireland continues to be provided at primary and secondary level on a predominately segregated basis. **We have a nine-point plan to expand the provision of integrated education.**
- Our health and social services are going through the greatest period of change and challenge for many years, but the current approach is not sustainable and not enough is being done to change it. **We will implement a programme of reform based on clinical evidence to secure a National Health Service, and not merely a notional one. This will include further investments in access for patients.**
- The DUP and Sinn Fein failed to spend £8 million out of the £12 million allocated to childcare in 2011-15 and haven't produced a comprehensive strategy. **We will produce a childcare strategy which develops affordable childcare opportunities to ease the burden on working parents.**

Good Leadership

- Alliance has taken a strong stand against sectarian division in Northern Ireland. Since our foundation in 1970 we have blazed a trail by promoting reconciliation and a shared society. **We will develop 'shared future proofing' so that all future Executive decisions promote sharing rather than separation.**
- The proposed withdrawal from the European Union poses major constitutional, economic and political challenges for Northern Ireland, but the DUP and Sinn Fein have failed to negotiate a sensible approach to them. **We will develop robust proposals for a special deal for Northern Ireland, recognising that Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU.**
- Led by Naomi Long, the Alliance has promoted openness and transparency in public life. This has been in stark contrast to other parties who have sought to obstruct and obfuscate when challenged. Alliance stands for politics which are open, transparent and accountable. **We will strengthen investigations into Ministerial wrong-doing by placing the Ministerial Code on a stronger legal footing and establishing independent investigations into alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code.**

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