



Together
We Can

Alliance

ALLIANCE PARTY
ASSEMBLY MANIFESTO 2022

APRIL 2022

Alliance

TOGETHER
WE CAN

ALLIANCE PARTY ASSEMBLY MANIFESTO 2022

	INTRODUCTION BY NAOMI LONG	4
	KEY POLICIES	6
	KEY ACHIEVEMENTS	10
	LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME	12
	CHAPTER 1: SHARED FUTURE, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS SHARED FUTURE · PARADES, FLAGS & DEALING WITH THE PAST GOOD RELATIONS · HUMAN RIGHTS · EQUALITY · OTHER EQUALITY ISSUES	13
	CHAPTER 2: JUSTICE JUSTICE DELIVERY · VICTIM-CENTRED JUSTICE · SAFER COMMUNITIES FASTER, FAIRER JUSTICE · PARAMILITARISM & ORGANISED CRIME PRISONS · YOUTH JUSTICE · LEGACY	19
	CHAPTER 3: FINANCE REDUCING THE COSTS OF DIVISION · REFORMING THE PUBLIC SECTOR IMPROVING BUDGET PROCESSES · REVENUE RAISING LEVELLING UP & THE SHARED PROSPERITY FUND · DEBT FORBEARANCE	25
	CHAPTER 4: COST OF LIVING	31
	CHAPTER 5: CLIMATE CHANGE & GREEN NEW DEAL CLIMATE CHANGE · GREEN NEW DEAL	35
	CHAPTER 6: HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRANSFORMATION · WAITING LISTS · MISSION · CONTEXT · FOCUS · SYSTEM HEALTH DELIVERY · SOCIAL CARE · COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY SECTOR	43



CHAPTER 7:
ECONOMY & SKILLS

51

A NEW & STRATEGIC ECONOMIC APPROACH
ECONOMIC POLICIES & DELIVERY STRUCTURES
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF LOCAL BUSINESSES
TOWN CENTRES & HIGH STREETS · SOCIAL ECONOMY · SKILLS
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT · EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS



CHAPTER 8:
EDUCATION

59

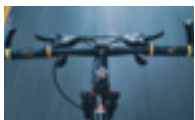
INTEGRATED EDUCATION · EARLY YEARS & CHILDCARE · HARRY'S LAW
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS · A COMPREHENSIVE, QUALITY CURRICULUM
SUPPORTING PUPILS & THEIR FAMILIES · STRUCTURES & BUILDINGS



CHAPTER 9:
AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

65

NATURE, WILDLIFE & BIODIVERSITY · NATIONAL PARKS · WASTE
AGRICULTURE · ANIMAL WELFARE



CHAPTER 10:
COMMUNITIES, ARTS & SPORT

71

SOCIAL SECURITY · EMPLOYMENT · HOUSING · REGENERATION & SHARED SPACE
THE ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE · SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
VOLUNTARY ACTION & ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP · LOCAL GOVERNMENT
RURAL COMMUNITIES



CHAPTER 11:
INFRASTRUCTURE

79

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE · WATER & SEWERAGE · SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT
ROADS FOR THE FUTURE · ACTIVE TRAVEL · IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY
ROAD SAFETY · PLANNING



CHAPTER 12:
BREXIT & THE PROTOCOL

85

OUR RECORD ON PROTOCOL FLEXIBILITIES · WAY FORWARD



CHAPTER 13:
GOVERNANCE & POLITICAL REFORM

89

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE · OPENNESS & TRANSPARENCY · CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION BY NAOMI LONG

Dear friend,

A generation ago, Northern Ireland came together to say 'Yes' to an historic opportunity. The Good Friday Agreement proved that **together, we can** achieve anything.

This May, we have a momentous opportunity to deliver real change for the better.

Political instability and collapse, caused by the selfish few, have been wasting energy instead of focusing it on what really matters – our health service, high paying jobs and healing division.

This failure of political leadership has stoked the flames of violence, failed our communities and held us back. To ensure devolution works, we need to break this cycle of crisis, of selfish ultimatums and self-serving political stunts.

A vote for Alliance is the strongest endorsement you can give for a politics focused on delivery, not drama.

Together, we can do things differently:

- **We can help fix our broken health service, tackle waiting lists and invest in mental health and preventative services.**
- **We can ensure our children are no longer educated apart and deliver a better future for our young people.**
- **We can secure reform of the Assembly to make sure no party can hold progress to ransom.**
- **We can deliver a Green New Deal to meet the climate emergency head on and create 50,000 green new jobs.**
- **We can build safer communities, tackling paramilitarism and hate crime, and better supporting victims.**
- **We can ensure none of us have to choose between heating our home and feeding our family.**
- **We can support a sustainable recovery from the pandemic for businesses, public services and communities.**

A vote for Alliance is a vote for a party that will work hard for everyone; this manifesto sets out the areas we will prioritise over the next five years to deliver progress for you, your family and your community.

We have focused specifically on those matters over which the Assembly has direct control or influence. This isn't a stand-alone document – to get the fullest picture of how Alliance plans to deliver better, it should be read in conjunction with our Local Government and Westminster manifestos, as well as our Green New Deal and Fighting Fit policy papers.

Your vote in May can elect more Alliance MLAs, and **together we can** make the focus delivery not division.

On May 5th, vote Alliance, and together, we can make it happen.

Yours sincerely,



Naomi Long

Leader, Alliance Party of Northern Ireland







KEY POLICIES

SHARED FUTURE, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

- Create a comprehensive and cross-cutting shared future strategy to drive forward cohesion, sharing and integration.
- Introduce a Single Equality Act for Northern Ireland covering age discrimination protections in goods, facilities and services.
- Support a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland that reflects international human rights standards and meets the needs of all citizens, and which can be used as a pre-scrutiny tool for legislation and policy decisions across government.

JUSTICE

- Strengthen legislation on hate crime through a new Hate Crime Bill.
- Deliver the remaining Gillen Review recommendations.
- Reform sentencing laws.
- Mainstream tackling paramilitarism within government.
- Create a new female prison facility at Hydebank Wood.
- Increase the age of criminal responsibility.
- Remove the reasonable chastisement defence.

FINANCE

- Create a plan to tackle the financial cost of division in Northern Ireland.
- Review the case for the devolution of further borrowing powers on the same basis as the Scottish Parliament, to enable additional capital investment.
- Reform the budget scrutiny process to allow for transparency and effective review.
- Introduce audits of division within all departmental budgets.
- Reform the civil service to attract the best talent.

COST OF LIVING

- Introduce a home heating support grant voucher scheme, targeted at low-income households.
- Roll out a £20 per week child payment to protect children already vulnerable to poverty.
- Work closely with the local banking sector to monitor the impact of rising interest rates.
- Explore initiatives to improve the affordability of food, particularly local produce.
- Bring home heating oil within the remit of the Utility Regulator.

CLIMATE CHANGE & GREEN NEW DEAL

- Deliver a Green New Deal to create at least 50,000 sustainable jobs by 2030.
- Create a new Department for Energy and Climate Change.
- Deliver an improved Northern Ireland Climate Change Act.
- Establish an Economic Strategy which will support clean and inclusive growth.
- Implement an immediate statutory ban on all current and future fossil fuel exploration, including fracking.

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

- Implement the recommendations of the Bengoa Review to transform our healthcare system.
- Tackle our waiting lists and invest in our workforce.
- Ensure that every Programme for Government has the promotion of good health and well-being as a top priority for all departments.
- Invest in mental health, including a fully funded ten year mental health strategy and separate emergency provision for those in mental health crisis.
- Focus on early intervention and prevention, such as addressing deprivation which leads to illness and disease, introducing cost-effective screening, and adopting a harm-reduction model in the treatment of alcohol and drug misuse.



ECONOMY & SKILLS

- Deliver the new Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland to address upskilling and retraining opportunities in the green economy.
- Support a strong 14-19 Strategy to bridge the interface between school and college, apprenticeships, and training.
- Introduce a Social Value Act to drive social change through procurement.
- Invest in research and development to ensure Northern Ireland is a global leader in areas such as the green economy.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy to rejuvenate our high streets and town centres.

EDUCATION

- End the use of academic criteria for post-primary transfer.
- Continue to promote and improve Integrated Education provision, building on our Integrated Education Bill.
- Create a universal, affordable childcare scheme, with fully funded hours paid directly to providers.
- Expand SureStart areas to support families facing disadvantage.
- Introduce Harry's Law to end the use of seclusion in schools and monitor the use of restraint as a last resort.
- Invest in mental health counselling services and referral services within schools.
- Secure evidence-based, inclusive Relationship and Sexuality Education in schools.

AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

- Establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency.
- Ban puppy farming and strengthen regulation of the legal puppy trade.
- Deliver an ambitious afforestation programme to increase Northern Ireland tree cover and achieve the current target of 19% cover by 2050.
- Introduce carbon audits for farms to support farmers to embrace environmentally beneficial farming practices.
- Expand the Environmental Farming Scheme to promote habitat restoration, including linking areas of high value by wildlife corridors.
- Tackle rural crime such as wildlife crime and livestock theft.

COMMUNITIES, ARTS & SPORT

- Push the UK Government to uplift benefits in line with the true rate of inflation.
- Prioritise the retrofitting of housing for renewable energy sources and insulation.
- Ensure any reforms to social housing provision do not jeopardise fairness, quality or diminish equality of access.
- Ensure good relations are a specific aim of regeneration and community planning.
- Commission an arts funding review.
- Introduce social prescribing and create well-being centres that have access to sports and leisure at the heart of communities.
- Recognise and support the development of British and Irish Sign Languages.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Create an independent infrastructure commission with a 30-year vision to prioritise, report on and drive delivery of infrastructure projects.
- Significantly increase spend per capita on Active Travel.
- Develop a modern, all-Ireland rail network through a new 5-year plan for rail investment.
- Create an independent Sustainable Travel Commissioner for Northern Ireland to increase uptake and address barriers.
- Review how the planning system can incentivise the greening of our towns and cities.

BREXIT & THE PROTOCOL

- Agree on a comprehensive set of agreements on a broad range of issues, including SPS checks, customs checks and governance and democratic accountability issues.
- Formalise arrangements on medicines.
- Create a comprehensive UK-EU Veterinary Agreement.
- Ensure enhanced representation for Northern Ireland elected representatives within the structures of the Trade & Cooperation Agreement.
- Promote NI as an investment location due to dual market access to GB and EU.

GOVERNANCE & POLITICAL REFORM

- End the designation system in the Assembly, replacing it with a weighted majority.
- Publish Executive meeting agendas to discourage the use of de facto vetoes of Executive business.
- Rename the First and deputy First Ministers as “Joint First Ministers”.
- Form an Executive through voluntary coalition, decided by negotiations between parties.
- Continue to pursue full transparency of political donations.
- Align the budget with Programme for Government objectives and outcomes.
- Extend voting to over 16s for all elections and referendums.





KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Through the negotiations that led to the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement, and over the past two years in the Assembly, Alliance has a track record of influencing outcomes and producing results.

JUSTICE

- Created a new domestic abuse offence of coercive control to capture non-physical abusive behaviour.
- Introduced a stalking offence for the first time in Northern Ireland, as well as Stalking Prevention Orders.
- Commenced Domestic Homicide Reviews, to prevent domestic violence and homicide, and to ensure that abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity.
- Strengthened measures to help victims of sexual offences – by delivering on the Gillen recommendations, outlawing up-skirting, down-blousing and cyber-flashing, and updating revenge porn laws.
- Removed the requirement for victims and witnesses to provide evidence in advance of a trial.
- Established the Victims' Payments Board to deliver the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme, after years of delay and deflection by others.

- Made compensation and personal injury arrangements fairer for victims.
- Appointed a Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate, who will give victims a stronger voice within the justice system.
- Commenced the Criminal Finances Act to crack down on the proceeds of organised crime.

GOVERNANCE, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

- Achieved reform of the Petition of Concern within NDNA.
- Legislated to ensure that teachers will, in future, be protected from religious discrimination in employment.
- Led efforts to reach agreement on measures to strengthen transparency and codes of conduct.
- Secured new forms of civic engagement, including citizens' assemblies.
- Successfully lobbied to remove a three-month ban on men who have sex with men from donating blood.
- Achieved support for a motion to outlaw the practice of conversion therapy in Northern Ireland.

FINANCE, THE ECONOMY & BREXIT

- Secured recognition of problems of costs of division in public finances.
- Drove the establishment of the Fiscal Council and Fiscal Commission on improving financial management.
- Championed better access to COVID-19 financial support measures.
- Secured an amendment to the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill extending the entitlement of paid leave to all those grieving a loss.
- Set out a plan for a green, equitable economy and the creation of 50,000 new green jobs by 2030 in our Green New Deal.
- First political party to call for grace periods on application of aspects of the Protocol.
- Successfully pushed for Northern Ireland political representation on UK-EU decision-making bodies.
- Achieved guarantees on the unfettered access for Northern Ireland goods to Great Britain, and for the removal of the need for exit summary declarations.
- Championed flexibilities on the regulation and supply of medicines into NI.
- Led the campaign for the creation of a UK-EU Veterinary Agreement.

CLIMATE CHANGE & THE ENVIRONMENT

- Secured Executive commitment to a Green New Deal in NDNA.
- First party to publish comprehensive proposals for a Green New Deal.
- Secured commitment to establish an Independent Infrastructure Commission.
- Shaped and strengthened Northern Ireland's first Climate Change legislation, securing sectoral plans that tackle inequality and support green jobs and a just transition for workers in high emitting industries.
- Advanced a Private Member's Bill to outlaw hunting with dogs but were unfortunately blocked by other parties.
- Achieved planned improvements to the Electric Vehicle Charging Network following presentation of a successful Alliance petition.

PUBLIC SERVICES

- Secured the first transformative piece of legislation for Integrated Education in the Assembly's history.
- Secured Independent Review of Education in NDNA.
- Successfully championed legislation to address restraint and seclusion in schools, and for flexible school starting age.
- Delivered access to bespoke and secure rehabilitation and retraining services for former prison officers.
- Published comprehensive proposals to transform our health service.
- Secured the Public Inquiry into Muckamore Abbey Hospital and the alleged mistreatment and abuse of patients.
- Successfully lobbied for a comprehensive Cancer Strategy and new Cancer Drugs Fund.
- Worked with birth mothers and adopted adults to force the issue of Mother & Baby Homes onto the agenda of the Executive Office and secure support for truth, justice and accountability going forward.
- Secured a Health Committee inquiry into waiting times.
- Successfully secured reform of Northern Ireland's out-dated licensing laws.
- Ensured renters' voices were included in legislation around private tenancies.



LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME

- **Single Equality Bill** – to update our equality and non-discrimination protections, closing existing gaps and including age-related discrimination in goods, facilities and services.
- **Hate Crime Bill** – to strengthen legislation on hate crimes, building on the recommendations of Judge Marrinan.
- **Sentencing Bill** – to allow for sentences that better fit the crimes committed, and to incorporate ‘Charlotte’s Law’.
- **Education Bill** – to introduce ‘Harry’s Law’, to amend the Minimum Content Order on Relationship and Sexuality Education, and to strengthen the statementing process.
- **Hunting Wild Mammals with Dogs Bill** – to ban this cruel sport, after other parties blocked our attempt to do so in the previous mandate.
- **Environment Bill** – to create an independent Environmental Protection Agency and to set legally binding targets for restoration of species and habitats.
- **Social Value Bill** – to ensure all public bodies are legally obliged to consider social value in all aspects of their service delivery.
- **Energy Bill** – to ban fossil fuel extraction and exploration, to bring oil within the remit of the Utility Regulator, and to require all departments to consider energy transition in policy development.
- **Housing Bill** – to compel developers to ensure new homes are sustainable, to strengthen regulation of letting agents, and to reform the management of apartments.
- **Employment Bill** – to regulate the gig economy, to strengthen flexible working options, and to ban ‘fire and rehire’ practices.
- **Animal Welfare Bill** – to ban puppy farming, to strengthen the regulation of the legal puppy trade, and to improve information-sharing so that people who are banned from keeping domestic animals are prevented from doing so.
- **Skills Bill** – to create a life-long learning guarantee.
- **Climate Change Bill** – to go beyond the current Climate Change Act, banning fossil fuel extraction and exploration.
- **Conversion Therapy Ban Bill** – to prohibit so-called “conversion therapy” which seeks to change, “cure”, suppress a person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- **Mobile Homes Bill** – to update the current Caravans Legislation from 2011 to provide local authorities with greater powers to enforce site license conditions against park owners.
- **Flying of Flags on Street Furniture Bill** – to regulate the flying of flags and other items on lamp posts to ensure that shared spaces are used for celebration, not demarcation of territory.
- **Repeal the Vagrancy Acts** – so that no one is criminalised for being homeless or destitute.
- **Repeal blasphemy laws** – to strengthen freedom of, and from religion, and so that these antiquated offences can never be used to curtail freedom of expression.

SHARED FUTURE	14
PARADES, FLAGS & DEALING WITH THE PAST	15
GOOD RELATIONS	15
HUMAN RIGHTS	15
EQUALITY	16
OTHER EQUALITY ISSUES	18

CHAPTER 1

SHARED FUTURE, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS



SHARED FUTURE, EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

The Alliance Party has a vision of a shared future where everyone is safe, can play their part and is treated fairly and with respect. We believe in a society for everyone, underpinned by our shared values of equality, respect for diversity and interdependence. People must be free from intimidation, discrimination and fear.

We reject the notion of parallel societies, with so-called 'separate, but equal' provision and instead believe a shared future will enable us to build a stronger Northern Ireland, making it a more attractive place to live and learn, and

to work and invest. This will also allow us to save resources by investing in services for everyone and ensure better public services for all.

Equality and human rights issues are an essential part of this shared future. Alliance will promote equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, equality of access, and equality under the law for all people, irrespective of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief, race and ethnicity, and political opinion.

SHARED FUTURE

Too often, parties have paid lip service to the ideals of a shared future, rather than implementing the necessary changes to have a truly integrated society. The lack of shared housing, provision of integrated education or continued demarcation of territory, continues to hold us back. This is not the image of a thriving society, and what should replace it is a progressive and inclusive community across Northern Ireland, with laws and policies which promote integration.

We believe radical change is needed to reduce the impact of division on our society. This cannot be the mission of one Executive Minister, but must be a priority across every department. Shared future considerations and a commitment to integration are included across our manifesto and any Alliance minister will make it a priority in their department.

As well as embedding our commitments to a shared future throughout government, there are a number of initiatives which can be taken forward to ensure that all departments are working to promote integration and reduce division.

At the heart of this must be a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy to replace the inadequate 'Together: Building a United Community'. We recommend that this follows best practice in policy development and includes the following elements:

- Clear definitions and understanding of key concepts of 'cohesion', 'sharing', and 'integration'.

- Strong vision and values that are used to drive forward the core objective of achieving cohesion, sharing and integration.
- Context and links between this strategy and other government policy objectives.
- An action plan with timetable and targets, and associated resource commitments.
- Clarity around a delivery mechanism and a monitoring and evaluation framework.

As there is an inextricable relationship between the creation of a shared future and the economic transformation of Northern Ireland, any strategy for a shared future must recognise that continued divisions limit Northern Ireland's potential.

We need the mechanisms, policies and programmes to dismantle the economic, social and financial barriers to a shared future. We would like to see:

- A practical and costed plan to tackle the financial implications of divisions within future Programmes for Government and budgets.
- All major policies assessed for their potential impact on sharing versus separation through Shared Future Policy Proofing.
- An obligation on all Departments to actively encourage de-segregation and to promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies, strategies and spending plans, including capital investment.

- New leisure, educational, health, social and community facilities being built with an explicit objective to ensure optimal and open public use.

This will, however, only set the context within which Executive Departments should develop policies for sharing and integration. Throughout this manifesto, we have incorporated many policies which will support a shared future for Northern Ireland.

PARADES, FLAGS & DEALING WITH THE PAST

We believe that the peace process remains under threat as the direct result of other politicians being unable to come to an 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 in the peace process as a whole.

As people, we share much in common, but we clearly have political and cultural identities which divide us and at times challenge us. If we want to build a genuinely shared future then we cannot avoid or ignore these tensions, and need to tackle them head-on.

Alliance believes that it is a failure to address these challenges that holds us back. It was the Executive's failure to do just this which led to the establishment of the Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) Commission. Alliance called on the Executive Office to publish the Commission's report, alongside an action plan to implement their recommendations. The recommendations and narrative contained in the report will guide us in our policies to effectively deal with the issues that divide our communities. In a new Executive, Alliance will publish an action plan to implement the recommendations.

Details on proposals regarding dealing with the legacy of the past can be found in the **Justice** section later in this manifesto.

GOOD RELATIONS

The good relations framework must extend beyond the traditional understanding of 'two communities' and should create a community that integrates every resident. In order to strengthen good relations, we will:

- Apply the good relations duty to all organisations operating in the public sector, including schools.
- Insert good relations indicators into appropriate departmental strategies to ensure that these are contributing to improving good relations.
- Actively monitor and assist local councils in designing good relations strategies and ensuring they improve good relations in their area.

HUMAN RIGHTS

We believe human rights are inherent and universal: an essential part of modern governance that protects the individual from injustice. That is why Alliance supports the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act.

We support the creation of a strong Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland that reflects international human rights standards and meets the needs of all citizens, not least those who experience discrimination and marginalisation. We believe that the Bill of Rights would be useful as pre-scrutiny tool for legislation and policy decisions across regional and local government.

Too often, Northern Ireland has had to rely on legislation from Westminster. Alliance believes the Assembly should enhance the protection of and legislate for human rights to the full extent that it can. We will oppose any attempts by the current UK Government to roll back or undermine human rights.

EQUALITY

Despite equality policy being primarily devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, no significant progressive reform to equality

legislation has passed under devolution: all the major reforms have occurred under 'Direct Rule'. This is not sustainable. We want a Single Equality Act that will harmonise existing 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 2010 Equality Act in Great Britain means that in certain areas our legislation lags behind the rest of the UK.

Alliance is deeply concerned about the rise in racial and religious hatred in Northern Ireland in recent years. Our proposal for a Single Equality Act would bring racial equality legislation in line with the rest of the UK and could be used as an instrument to deliver on racial and religious protections.

The New Decade, New Approach agreement committed to the introduction of a wide range of equality legislation and strategies, therefore aiming to address decades of inequality for many in society. These strategies are now overdue and will be a priority for Alliance in a new Executive.

People with Disabilities

In order to ensure that people with disabilities have equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland, we commit to:

- Incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights for Persons with disabilities into domestic law.
- Creating a Pedestrian's Charter.
- Dignity of care in provision of services, such as replacement of equipment without delay in order to live a day to day life.
- Recognition of non-verbal and non-signing communication as a means of language.
- Introduction of a Sign Language Act.
- Ensuring there is a clear pathway for transitional arrangements for people with disabilities leaving full-time education, which is standardised across the region.

- Increasing the provision of Changing Places facilities in public sector buildings and new builds the next Assembly mandate.

Women

Alliance will continue to highlight the need for practical interventions to remove systemic barriers which prevent equal opportunities for women. Our priorities for supporting women will include:

- Setting robust targets for the uptake in Northern Ireland of UK-wide childcare schemes, as part of a comprehensive Childcare Strategy.
- Promoting and improving Shared Parental Leave and flexible working arrangements which Alliance introduced via the Department for Employment and Learning.
- Promoting gender considerations into careers promotion, particularly in relation to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) opportunities.
- Continuing our strong opposition to domestic and sexual violence by investing in welfare facilities, education and awareness programmes. This will include support for refuges and other support services for victims, and recognition that these services require specialist expertise and knowledge from providers.
- Establishing mentoring schemes to increase the number of women in decision making positions.
- Reforming the pension system to ensure it is based on residence, recognising that women are more likely to take breaks from contributions or make lower levels of contributions.
- Renewing efforts to tackle Equal Pay and implement regulations about public audits of the gender profile of pay by large employers.

LGBTQI+ People

Alliance has long supported the rights of LGBTQI+ people, who sadly still often face discrimination and stigma. Our priorities for improving LGBTQI+ rights include:

- Banning the harmful practice of so-called “Conversion Therapy”.
- Producing guidance for schools on addressing prejudice and homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying in schools.
- Asking every service to audit how their services are provided to LGBTQI+ people to ensure no accidental bias.
- Developing a comprehensive Strategy for Transgender People, to ensure that the distinct needs of transgender people are reflected in public services and other areas of life. We will back this up with legislation if necessary.
- Ensuring the provision of trans healthcare is human rights compliant and adheres to best practice globally.
- Introducing inclusive Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) into the school curriculum.
- Reforming and simplifying laws on gender recognition so that trans people can obtain legal recognition with a simple administrative process based on the principle of statutory declaration, and without intrusive medical diagnosis requirements.
- Delivering the long overdue Sexual Orientation Strategy.

Children and Young People

Alliance wants to ensure that children and young people aren't left out of political debate and are protected from discrimination. We will:

- Improve the political voice of young people by arguing for the introduction of votes at 16 as part of legislation which covers people of all ages.
- Ensure that any new age discrimination legislation protects under-16s.

- Introduce children's budgeting for spending in Northern Ireland to ensure transparency on overall spending on children.
- Build on our record in the Executive to ensure a wide variety of education, training and employment schemes continue to be available specifically designed to assist young people.
- Develop the financial skills of young people through education and collaboration with banks to produce financial services suitable for children.

Older People

Alliance believes that we need to see a shift in the way we consider older people's contribution to society. Often older people are seen primarily as users of health and social care and whilst it is important that we reform these services to ensure they meet the needs of older people, we also want to focus on the positive aspects that older people bring to Northern Ireland. We want to make society a place where older people are valued and supported to live life to its fullest potential, with their rights respected and dignity protected. We will achieve this by:

- Introducing age discrimination legislation on accessing goods, facilities and services through a Single Equality Act.
- Creating a Programme for Government that includes outcomes for an ageing and older population.
- Reforming adult social care provision funding on the same basis as access to NHS provision.
- Using the Active Ageing Strategy as the basis of our provision of services to older people. We acknowledge that the current strategy is imperfect and will seek to improve it.
- Recognising that many older people may wish to stay in work and providing them with the opportunity to improve their skills.
- Promoting the uptake of pension credit and other benefits on which older people sometimes miss out.
- Creating a Loneliness Strategy.

Immigration and Asylum

Alliance represents everyone in Northern Ireland, and as such, we have long opposed the UK Government's hostile environment. Migration is a normal part of human life: it enriches our culture, opens our minds, causes love and families to grow, and significantly improves our economy.

From the humanitarian crises of Afghanistan and Ukraine to the deaths of migrants in the Channel, it is clear that the people of Northern Ireland reject the Conservative Government's callous approach and want to play their part in supporting refugees and creating an inclusive, vibrant and welcoming society.

Immigration and asylum are reserved matters and opposing the Conservative Government's anti-immigration agenda is a major priority for Alliance at Westminster. Nevertheless, we believe there is scope to use devolved powers to create mitigations and strengthen migrant and asylum seekers' rights in Northern Ireland.

Welcoming Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees and people seeking asylum face significant barriers in accessing support to meet their basic needs, including physical and mental healthcare, education, financial security and support to rebuild their lives in a new place of safety.

Alliance will ensure asylum seekers and refugees are integrated safely and inclusively into society. To do this, we will:

- Continue to oppose the increasingly restrictive hostile environment policies, including the ban on working for those seeking asylum.
- Implement the Refugee Integration Strategy on a cross departmental basis, in collaboration with the community and voluntary sector working with those who arrive in Northern Ireland.
- Ensure a trauma-informed approach is applied to the physical and mental health support available to refugees and people seeking asylum, recognising they are a group particularly at risk of experiencing trauma prior to their arrival.

- Ensures a human rights based, case-by-case approach is applied to education policy and practice to remove barriers refugee children and children in the asylum system face in enjoying full access to education.
- Fund the TEO Crisis Fund on a permanent basis, so that that refugees and people seeking asylum can access emergency support all year round to help them through the extreme hardships of destitution.
- Provide refugee family reunion integration services on a sustainable, long-term basis.

OTHER EQUALITY ISSUES

Defamation

Whilst recent reforms are welcome, many aspects of Northern Ireland's defamation laws are outdated. Wealthy individuals are using our current laws to intimidate others with the threat of legal action that can be both lengthy and costly. It is vital that we can strike a balance on freedom of expression, to progress much-needed reform.

Marriage

In order to reflect our commitment to equality and freedom of religion, Alliance would reform our current marriage laws to put belief marriage on an equal footing with religious marriage.

We would also raise the minimum age for marriage and civil partnerships to 18, as is the recommendation of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Through this legislative change, we aim to ensure that the free will of the child is safeguarded and also to combat forced marriage, which qualifies as a form of gender-based violence.

No Fault Divorce

Northern Ireland currently lags behind England and Wales in relation to the law regarding grounds for divorce. Current divorce law stipulates that blame must be attributed to one party. Alliance will introduce 'no fault' divorce, removing the need for the end of a marriage to have been someone's 'fault'.

JUSTICE DELIVERY	20
VICTIM-CENTRED JUSTICE	21
SAFER COMMUNITIES	21
FASTER, FAIRER JUSTICE	22
PARAMILITARISM & ORGANISED CRIME	22
PRISONS	23
YOUTH JUSTICE	23
LEGACY	24

CHAPTER 2 **JUSTICE**



JUSTICE

Alliance believes that respect for the rule of law, and efficient and effective policing and justice systems are critical for a healthy, vibrant and shared society.

In the Department of Justice, Alliance has delivered progressive and wide-ranging reforms, with five pieces of legislation in just two years.

But there is much more to be done, and we cannot continue to expect crime and reoffending levels to reduce whilst failing to prevent people from coming into contact with the justice system in the first place. This work begins in other departments – such as Health, Education and Communities – and so we need a truly cross-Executive approach to justice.

JUSTICE DELIVERY

In a short mandate, Alliance has delivered in Justice. We have:

- Created a new domestic abuse offence of coercive control to capture non-physical abusive behaviour.
- Introduced a stalking offence for the first time in Northern Ireland, as well as Stalking Prevention Orders.
- Commenced Domestic Homicide Reviews, in order to prevent domestic violence and homicide, and to ensure that abuse is identified and responded to effectively at the earliest opportunity.
- Strengthened measures to help victims of sexual offences – by delivering on the Gillen recommendations, outlawing up-skirting, down-blousing and cyber-flashing, and updating revenge porn laws.
- Removed the requirement for victims and witnesses to provide evidence in advance of a trial.
- Made compensation and personal injury arrangements fairer for victims.
- Appointed a Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate, who will give victims a stronger voice within the justice system.
- Commenced the Criminal Finances Act to crack down on the proceeds of organised crime.
- Established the Victims' Payments Board to deliver the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme, after years of delay and deflection by others.
- Increased support available for serving prison officers and extended the health and well-being services provided by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust to retired officers.
- Consulted on important changes to be made in the new mandate, such as proposals for 'Charlotte's Law' in relation to disclosure of information on the locations of victims' remains by those convicted of their killing, on policing oversight, as well as the contents of a Hate Crime Bill.
- Published strategies and action plans to address key issues such as Victims and Witnesses, Organised Crime, Forensic Services, Adult Restorative Justice and Digital Justice.
- Completed work on a Sentencing Bill for the next mandate, which will allow for sentences that better fit the crimes committed.

VICTIM-CENTRED JUSTICE

For too long, the voices of victims in our criminal justice system have not been heard. Processes are difficult to navigate and victims have often reported feeling overwhelmed and side-lined in cases which can be life-changing for them.

Alliance believes that we need to place victims at the centre of the justice system in a way that delivers fairly and effectively for everyone.

We can do this by making the whole system more accessible and easier to understand, by ensuring vulnerable victims are protected in court, and by ensuring that victims have an advocate in the new Victims of Crime Commissioner Designate.

We will:

- Implement the new Victims and Witnesses Strategy, which will improve the experiences of victims within the criminal justice system by: enhancing the Victim and Witness Care Unit; providing practical support to give best evidence; raising awareness of the Victims Charter; delivering trauma-informed training of criminal justice partners; and strengthening protections for vulnerable victims and witnesses.
- Deliver on the remaining recommendations in the Gillen Review to support victims in cases of serious sexual assaults.
- Place the Victims of Crime Commissioner on a statutory footing, building on the scoping work undertaken by the Commissioner Designate.
- Modernise our Courts Estate, creating facilities which are accessible to all, including a hub in the north-west.
- Support the use of technology in court, including potentially broadcasting court proceedings.
- Legislate on Charlotte's Law, to improve opportunities for disclosure of information on the locations of victims' remains by those convicted of their killing.

SAFER COMMUNITIES

All crime causes harm: whether that is physical injury, mental trauma or financial cost, these all take a toll on our communities and our society more widely. The shared communities that we want to build are safe communities.

This is why Alliance believes that we need to ensure offenders are held accountable for the crimes they commit, that investment is made in the latest evidence-gathering techniques, and that the justice system is responsive to new and emerging types of crime.

We will:

- Strengthen legislation on hate crime through a new Hate Crime Bill.
- Support the innovative work undertaken by the Probation Board of Northern Ireland and community and voluntary sector partners, such as problem-solving justice, which reduces rates of offending.
- Pursue a cross-Executive, harm reduction approach to community safety and reducing offending, by tackling mental health and substance abuse issues in the community before people become involved in criminality.
- Work with communities to reduce the number of interface structures across Northern Ireland.
- Deliver a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy to raise awareness, support victims and address offending behaviour.
- Consult on new legislative proposals to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Continue to tackle violence against women and girls by keeping the law around drink spiking and street harassment under review.
- Repeal the Vagrancy Acts, so that no one is criminalised for being destitute or homeless.

FASTER, FAIRER JUSTICE

Our criminal justice system is too slow as a result of outdated practices and chronic underinvestment. Delays impact most heavily on victims and witnesses but also on those accused of crimes. Whilst the pandemic has exacerbated an already difficult situation, progress had been made in early 2020 which can be built upon for the future.

This will require investment right across the justice system: from policing, to courts, to prisons. Alliance believes it is imperative that we make this investment to create a modern justice system that is fair and efficient.

We will:

- Continue the roll out of committal reform, which will reduce the burden on witnesses having to give evidence twice and which will also reduce delay.
- Further embed the use of live-links within the justice system, removing the need for victims, witnesses and perpetrators to travel to court and therefore reducing the disruption caused by adjournments.
- Reform sentencing so that it better reflects the seriousness of the crime and so that sentences are easily understood.
- Implement the Adult Restorative Justice Strategy to provide opportunities to repair harm, minimise the impact of offending on victims and to reduce court caseloads through the use of effective diversionary restorative options.
- Commence a review of access to justice, including consideration of whether and how to reform and extend legal aid entitlement to those who need it.

PARAMILITARISM & ORGANISED CRIME

There is no place for paramilitarism in our society: these are criminal gangs who exploit people and communities. Active paramilitary groups should disband or, like other organised crime gangs, face a robust law enforcement approach which will disrupt and dismantle their operations.

We will:

- Continue to support investment in cyber-crime and forensics to allow law enforcement partners to relentlessly disrupt and pursue organised crime groups.
- Work on a cross-agency, cross-departmental basis to recognise the complex nature of organised crime.
- Further embed a public health approach to our work in tackling paramilitarism, building on the learning from innovative initiatives such as the Connect Project.
- Introduce Violence Reduction Units, bringing together specialists to tackle violent crime and address its underlying causes.
- Address the structural factors which leave young people vulnerable to exploitation by paramilitaries and organised crime gangs: educational underachievement, unemployment, poverty, substance abuse and family breakdown.
- Mainstream tackling paramilitarism within government: the entire public sector must adopt a similar policy-proofing process to that of Equality Impact Assessments.
- Create a protocol for community and public bodies engaging with representatives of paramilitary groups.
- Continue to advocate for a unified approach to tackling all forms of paramilitary and terrorist activity, irrespective of source.
- Treat paramilitary style attacks as human rights abuses and explore the use of safeguarding and modern slavery laws to crack down on those responsible.

PRISONS

Using prisons solely to punish those who have offended is both wrong and ineffective: without a focus on rehabilitation, prisons become a 'revolving door' in the justice system, where offenders end up in a cycle of reoffending and custody.

We believe we need to use the most effective criminal justice approaches to divert, rehabilitate and reintegrate people who have offended in order to make our communities safer. This means that whilst the deprivation of liberty of a custodial sentence is a punishment, being within our prisons is an opportunity for change.

Alliance Justice Ministers have been responsible for driving wide-ranging and transformative reforms within our prisons over the past ten years, but there is much more to do. We will:

- Review issues around bail and remand, to tackle the very high levels of remand prisoners in our custody.
- Continue to use technology as a force for good within prisons, for example by facilitating virtual visits for prisoners who want to use them.
- Progress an ambitious capital programme for our prison estate, including the redevelopment of Magilligan and a new female facility at Hydebank Wood.
- Implement the strategy for supporting and challenging women in girls in contact with the justice system.
- Commence a review of through-the-gate support for those leaving our custody, working across Executive departments to join up on issues such as healthcare, housing and training, to improve opportunities for rehabilitation.
- Examine alternatives to custody and make recommendations on the use of a presumption against short custodial sentences where there is a low public protection risk.
- Implement the Prisons 25by25 strategic improvement programme, creating a modern, progressive and innovative Prison Service which makes the community safer by challenging and supporting people to change.

YOUTH JUSTICE

Alliance believes that we need to centre the child's best interests in the youth justice system: taking a trauma-informed approach, diverting children from the criminal justice system at the earliest possible stage, and only ever placing a child in custody as a last resort. By doing all these things we can improve the well-being and life chances of vulnerable children and improve outcomes for children, families and victims.

We want a compassionate and holistic approach to youth offending and youth justice. We will:

- Change the age of criminal responsibility from ten, which is one of the lowest in Europe, to 14.
- Simplify parts of the youth court process, particularly around the number and structure of court-ordered community sentences.
- Introduce legislation to remove the defence of reasonable chastisement.
- Legislate on bail and remand for children, strengthening the existing automatic presumption of bail for children in order to comply with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child responsibilities.
- Create a Regional Care and Justice Campus which will promote a caring and therapeutic environment to address the complex needs of young people, and which will provide the best possible support to the small number of children and young people who require a period of secure accommodation for their own safety or the safety of others.

LEGACY

Alliance has long advocated an overarching mechanism for dealing with the legacy of Northern Ireland's past. We remain committed to establishing and supporting all of the legacy institutions proposed in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement and we are deeply concerned by the UK Government's decision to renege on its commitment to the New Decade, New Approach agreement to legislate on those legacy institutions. The proposals contained in their Command Paper of July 2021 represent a political betrayal and a gross insult to victims and survivors, who have the right to, and expectation of, truth and justice.

The proposals represent an unwarranted and unjustified interference in due process and would undermine public confidence in the justice system.

Whilst the UK Government refuses to implement the Stormont House institutions to deal with the legacy of our past in Northern Ireland, the modern justice system feels the strain.

Alliance remains committed to the following principles: promoting reconciliation; upholding the rule of law; acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims and survivors; facilitating the pursuit of justice and information recovery; human rights compliance, and balance, proportionality and fairness. We will continue to promote and pursue these aims.



REDUCING THE COSTS OF DIVISION	26
REFORMING THE PUBLIC SECTOR	27
IMPROVING BUDGET PROCESSES	28
REVENUE RAISING	28
LEVELLING UP & THE SHARED PROSPERITY FUND	29
DEBT FORBEARANCE	30

CHAPTER 3 **FINANCE**



FINANCE

Sound public finances are essential for a strong economy and investment in public services. As a region that relies on a significant financial subvention, Northern Ireland is particularly vulnerable to changes or deficiencies in public expenditure decisions taken in Westminster, and there is a particular challenge to ensure that available resources are used efficiently and strategically.

Repeated deadlock and dysfunction undermine the provision of public services and results in missed opportunities, financial waste and general economic and political instability, to the detriment of our businesses and citizens.

This financial situation is being exacerbated by the cost of living crisis: people are struggling to make ends meet and face further and prolonged increases in energy and other costs. The most vulnerable members of society, including children in low income families, face continued hardship.

To maximise the impact of the Northern Ireland budget, we believe four key areas of reform are needed:

- 1 **Reducing the costs of division.**
- 2 **Reforming the public sector.**
- 3 **Improving budget processes.**
- 4 **Reviewing existing and potential revenue raising options.**

REDUCING THE COSTS OF DIVISION

Alliance has long advocated that the Executive tackle division and segregation, not just because of our strong preference for promoting integration and a shared future, but because we know that a divided society costs more to run.

Major distortions and financial inefficiencies remain in Northern Ireland due to the provision of public services in the context of a divided society. This is not just a legacy issue; this duplication in service delivery continues to be replicated and embedded within public spending, resulting in significant waste and unnecessary financial constraints elsewhere, and opportunity costs in terms of better use of scarce resources. As financial pressures grow, the cost of division becomes even more untenable.

The current estimates of the cost of division range between £400m and £830m annually. This is money that could be used to invest in reform of our public services, such as health and education.

The costs of a divided society can be considered within four contexts:

- Direct costs of policing riots, other civil disturbances and parades, the distortions to policing that arise from the security threat, and the costs to a wide range of agencies in repairing damaged buildings and facilities.
- Costs associated with providing duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community, either implicitly or explicitly. This includes services in relation to schools, GP surgeries, job centres, community centres, and leisure centres, for example.
- Hidden costs which impact upon the environment within which departments and agencies operate. Examples include significant pressures on the housing sector from demographic imbalances and senses of territoriality, and implications for mobility.
- Lost opportunities for economic activity and tax revenue from lost investment and tourism.

It is essential that we acknowledge and address the financial and societal implications of division in Northern Ireland. We want to ensure any associated savings are redirected into reforming public services, and growing and rebalancing the local economy.

We will:

- Create a practical and costed plan to tackle the financial and societal impacts of division.
- Pursue policy solutions that directly address the costs of divisions such as integrated education and shared housing.

REFORMING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Northern Ireland has undergone significant public sector reform in the last decade. The Local Government Act and the restructuring of the Executive departments demonstrates that significant public sector reform can take place – if the political will exists.

The pandemic has also necessitated quick, radical change in service delivery, particularly in health but also through the administration of finance to businesses and the community and voluntary sector. Whilst imperfect, this highlights that restructuring delivery is possible on a long-term basis.

Alliance believes that a shift in the balance of resources into programmes that seek to prevent problems from emerging can produce savings by avoiding the need to spend greater levels of resources after problems fully develop. However, the funding of the former tends to be optional, while the funding of the latter tends to be statutory. A focus on preventative measures can ensure savings across a range of public spending areas including health, justice and social care.

There are a number of areas where reform could be undertaken to improve public services whilst allowing budgets to be cut.

To do this, we will:

- Ensure that the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report into the Capacity and Capability of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and the Report into the RHI inquiry, are responded to in full.
- Sponsor a programme of reform to attract the best talent to work for the civil service.
- Strengthen efforts to achieve diversity in public appointments.
- Create a public register of publicly-owned land and property in order to assist planning and divestment.
- Generate savings through the sale of public assets when public sector reforms reduce the number of buildings or land required by the Executive. This will generate capital receipts for investment elsewhere. Some of the receipts should be earmarked for investing in energy efficiency across the public sector to lower energy costs in the long run.
- Promote and encourage the delivery of services on a North-South basis, underpinned by a work programme agreed between the Executive and the Irish Government, including: all-island marketing, e.g. tourism, green economy; investing in infrastructure, such as energy, transport, telecommunications; culture; environmental protection; and addressing barriers to labour market mobility.

IMPROVING BUDGET PROCESSES

As indicated previously, the amount of public sector funds available for Northern Ireland is important. However, the way in which funds are allocated and spent, and the timeframes involved, also matter hugely in terms of enabling the desired economic and social outcomes.

There are many steps which the UK Government and Executive can take to improve the current process and make it more accessible to the public, and to members of the Assembly, for effective and efficient scrutiny.

Alliance will:

- Deliver alignment between an outcome-based Programme for Government and a multi-year budget, to enable strategic long-term planning and delivery.
- Establish funding streams at the centre, accessible only via cross departmental funding bids which incentivise cross departmental collaborative working towards Programme of Government Outcomes, such as a more healthy society, focused on preventative healthcare measures.
- Task the Fiscal Council to assess the cost of provision on our public services, and to produce a roadmap on the long-term financial sustainability of priority areas such as the health service, education and Northern Ireland Water.
- Consider expediting strategic capital expenditure to provide much needed investment in key areas such as clean energy whilst simultaneously supporting the economy.
- Benchmark the cost and quality of services where appropriate to ensure that they are delivering value for money.
- Fundamentally re-assess the need of each service and money allocated to the departments on that basis.
- Provide a formal assessment at each monitoring round of the relative importance of what have been termed as 'inescapable pressures' versus the impact of the cuts elsewhere to meet them.
- Ensure transparency in funding for the Health Service, to assist with monitoring progress on transformation.

REVENUE RAISING

Relative to our counterparts in Wales and Scotland, and of course the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive raises a relatively small proportion of tax and other revenue, relative to expenditure – less than £1 in every £20. According to the Fiscal Council, spending is financed from the Block Grant (65%), other UK funding (29%), income from fees and charges (3%) and Regional Rates and other income (4%).

This leaves Northern Ireland particularly reliant on funds provided by Westminster: the Block Grant and Barnett consequentials. This is not a tenable position. It makes the Executive less accountable, and also undermines its ability to implement taxation to incentivise desirable behaviours and to complement local policymaking in other devolved areas, for example taxation on tobacco and alcohol.

Alliance welcomes the work of the Fiscal Commission in exploring potential options for enhanced revenue raising powers. Any options should be progressive in impact and consistent with wider economic and social objectives. We also favour policies that will incentivise green behaviours, in accordance with the pursuance of a green recovery.

As detailed in previous sections, Alliance believes that any discussion regarding potential revenue raising must be underpinned by a coherent package of efficiency reforms. It is important that people are not being asked to paper over the cracks in public finances through revenue raising in the absence of other reforms. It is also essential that the Executive has adequate capacity to competently absorb and manage associated financial powers.

On the issue of tax raising powers, Alliance commits to:

- Review the final report of the Fiscal Commission on the use of tax-varying powers to raise additional revenue and stimulate economic growth, whilst incentivising green and other desirable social behaviours.
- Consider the potential case for a reduced rate of Stamp Duty on greener homes to incentivise supply of and demand for more efficient properties.
- Consider the usefulness of a green levy.
- Commission an independent review of the rating system, including the rates cap, to assess whether the system is fit for purpose in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Revalue properties on a more regular basis, in order to ensure that rateable values accurately reflect economic trends.
- Review the case for the devolution of further borrowing powers on the same basis as the Scottish Parliament to enable additional capital investment.
- Consider how any enhanced fiscal powers might align with an Infrastructure Commission for Northern Ireland, as per that in situ in Scotland, to maximise the economic impact of additional revenues over longer-time frames.
- Undertake a review of the case for a Regional Investment Bank.

LEVELLING UP & THE SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

Alliance regrets the loss of EU funding to Northern Ireland, particularly the structural funds of the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

We are deeply concerned that the replacement funds, such as the Shared Prosperity Fund and other Levelling Up Funds are to be controlled by the UK Government, and there will be a reduction in funding and uncertainty as to the areas of activity that will be supported. There is a risk of duplication in some areas and gaps in others. This will place a lot of core services, including apprenticeship, labour market inclusion measures, disability employment, regeneration and economic development measures, in jeopardy.

We will continue to lobby for the resources and responsibility for these funds to be transferred to the Executive.

DEBT FORBEARANCE

The state of business finances as companies emerge from the pandemic will be key in determining the rate and scale of economic recovery – heavily indebted businesses may be impeded in their ability to grow and invest. We could face a generation of businesses unable to grow due to debt on balance sheets.

Government policy should consider the fact that companies could be impeded in their ability to grow by newly acquired debt and so other incentives or reliefs may be necessary – when appropriate – to encourage hiring of new staff and spending on research and development, for example, which are important from a broader economic perspective.

Alliance will:

- Commit to ensuring that there are appropriate systems in place for those struggling with debt repayment.
- Consider the role of Equity Finance in potential recapitalisation.
- Monitor supply chain pressures and the impact on companies and associated jobs.
- Adopt an all-island approach to economic mitigation and recovery to enable economies of scale, maximise impact via coordinated action, and prevent duplication of effort.





COST OF LIVING

The cost of living crisis facing millions of households is a cross-departmental problem, requiring a range of interventions to protect vulnerable households and, as such, it is being treated as a distinct issue in this manifesto.

As discussed in the **Finance** section of the manifesto, Alliance is uniquely placed to enable additional, much needed, public funds via eliminating the costs of division. Now, more than ever, it is essential that we reduce the wastage associated with funding a divided society to ensure that all public funds are used responsibly, effectively and for the benefit of all citizens.

The Alliance Party is increasingly concerned about the cost of living crisis in Northern Ireland. With so many households already struggling to make ends meet due to the pandemic, we are now facing the biggest fall in living standards since comparable records began, as inflation continues to erode the value of wages and benefits.

Not only is the cost of living crisis likely to worsen poverty levels and inequality, but it also presents a threat to economic recovery. The squeeze on disposable incomes is likely to result in reduced consumer spending, in the wake of an already difficult period for businesses. If this destabilises economic recovery, this could cost jobs and further reduce living standards.



The surge in energy prices is a consequence of the rate of economic recovery since the pandemic. However, the problem is compounded by our reliance on these energy sources and a failure by the Government to scale up alternative clean energy sources.

Russian aggression against Ukraine and the resultant crisis will exacerbate rising energy and food costs and urgent action is required to protect the most vulnerable people in our community and prevent lasting social and economic damage.

The UK Government's Spring Statement proposals have done little to help the most vulnerable in society who have been particularly affected by the cost of living crisis. There is a need for both urgent proposals to assist struggling households, and longer-term plans for tackling reliance on unclean energy sources and improving energy efficiency.

Whilst there are considerable cost implications associated with our proposals, in the short term, they can be funded through some resources that are available to the Executive through Barnett consequential and underspends. In the medium-longer term, they can be sustained through our wider financial proposals.

Furthermore, a failure to mitigate the potentially deep and lasting consequences of the cost of living crisis would not only be unforgivable from a moral perspective, it would also likely cost much more to rectify.

More widely, the cost of living pressures need to be mitigated through job creation, productivity improvements and wage growth, and more sustainable energy sources. These issues are addressed in our chapters on the **Economy** and **Climate Change & Green New Deal**.

At a Northern Ireland level, we commit to the following interventions to alleviate the impact of cost pressures:

- Creating a Home Heating Support Grant Voucher Scheme targeting low-income households, who will suffer a disproportionate impact from rising energy costs.
- Rolling out a Child Payment Scheme in the form of a per child weekly payment for any family with children in receipt of Free School Meals, and for pre-school age children in low-income households.
- Reviewing the Executive's capacity to re-direct resources or fully utilise borrowing powers to fund the impact of rising costs for the most vulnerable members of society.
- Liaising closely with the local banking sector to monitor the impact of rising interest rates.
- Pushing expedited investment in energy efficiency within housing to mitigate exposure to rising energy costs.
- Exploring initiatives to improve the affordability of food and incentivise a 'local produce first' model to reduce carbon footprint, fuel transport costs, and bolster the local agri-food sector.
- Bringing home heating oil within the remit of the Utility Regulator, to bring this market in line with gas and electricity and to ensure price transparency for consumers.

In addition to these local policy commitments, Alliance is calling for the UK Government to:

- Temporarily finance green levies on energy, allowing the green impact to be sustained but redistributing the cost of these levies from the consumer to the Government.
- Expedite investment in green energies, to reduce reliance on oil, coal and gas and thus prevent repetition of the crisis we are currently facing.
- Levy a Windfall Tax on energy firms that have made super profits during the period associated with post-pandemic recovery, enabling these resources to be redistributed to those most negatively impacted.
- Abolish the planned increased in National Insurance Contributions in April.
- Continue to urge that Universal Credit and other benefits rise in line with the current rate of inflation in April 2022, rather than the historic figure from September 2021.
- Provide advice on debt management and forbearance.
- Issue Green Bonds to enable the financing of some of the above proposals, facilitating a redistribution of some debt liabilities into the future.



CHAPTER 5
CLIMATE CHANGE & GREEN NEW DEAL



CLIMATE CHANGE & GREEN NEW DEAL

Under the Paris Agreement, the world must reach net zero by 2050 to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees by the end of this

century. That is regarded as the bare minimum to avoid the worst effects of climate change and to preserve a liveable planet.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has existential implications for our planet and humanity. At present the world is not on course to meet the targets of the Paris Climate Agreement, and few countries have a genuine plan to reach net zero by 2050.

While we will all experience the effects of climate change, we won't all do so equally, nor do we all bear equal responsibility. The climate crisis has long caused devastating consequences for millions of people living in the Global South, and they will continue to suffer the greatest effects of climate change. Nevertheless, the effects of climate change will be very evident in the UK and Ireland, where extreme weather events are becoming more frequent occurrences.



Northern Ireland Context

While on average the UK has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 43% between 1990 and 2018, Northern Ireland lags way behind other regions with a decrease of only 20%.

Addressing our agriculture and transport sectors is fundamental to drastically reducing emissions in Northern Ireland. Nearly 30% of Northern Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are from agriculture, compared to 10% in the rest of the UK. This reflects the importance of agriculture to our economy, as well as our larger livestock base.

As of 2018, statistics show that not only were these the two largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (agriculture with 27% and transport with 23%), they were the only sectors where emissions actually increased over the past three decades.

The Northern Ireland economy is heavily reliant on agriculture, but we must ensure progressive and managed change within the industry. Northern Ireland is also the only part of the UK where our land use, land-use change, and forestry sector is a net carbon source rather than a net sink.

Active travel and our public transport network have suffered from chronic underinvestment for years, which means we are hugely over-reliant on private car use. We must rebalance our infrastructure spending towards active and sustainable travel, with Government leading and enabling change in light of the new ways we will work and live.

Northern Ireland has only just achieved its first Climate Change Act. While it is important to at least have a framework in place, this does not yet provide the necessary commitments for Northern Ireland to reach net zero by 2050.

Alliance is therefore committed to fresh climate legislation in the next Assembly mandate to address these and other outstanding issues.

GREEN NEW DEAL

The pandemic has shown us how our economy and society directly impact our ability to get through a crisis: from our physical and mental health, our jobs and housing conditions, to our access to social security, green space and public services.

Tackling the climate emergency also involves much more than environmental policy. A Green New Deal recognises that tackling the climate emergency goes hand in hand with economic and social justice. It's about rapidly decarbonising our economy, and in doing so, creating an equitable, sustainable economy filled with well-paid, secure green jobs in existing and emerging industries.

Alliance has developed its own Green New Deal for Northern Ireland. The full document can be accessed via https://www.allianceparty.org/alliance_green_new_deal.

Time is quickly running out to tackle the climate emergency. Yet, in doing so, we can build the future we not only want but need:

- Creating thousands of secure, green jobs by stimulating our economy and reskilling workers.
- Preserving our planet for future generations.
- Building an inclusive, equitable society for everyone.

This is our vision for an urgent, radical overhaul of the policies and practices that hinder our progress and exploit our people and our planet. It's also our plan to grasp the enormous opportunities in moving towards a sustainable, green economy, with the Alliance Green New Deal creating at least 50,000 jobs by 2030.

This section addresses a number of core areas for delivering a Green New Deal.

Green Economy

The Alliance Green New Deal aims to make Northern Ireland one of the most innovative, inclusive and sustainable regional economies in Europe. The green economy can provide new and sustainable means of driving economic growth.

To do this, we must radically invest, adapt and modernise, building on what made us prosperous in the past and harnessing the creativity and funding needed to create a thriving and equitable decarbonised economy.

The new green economy must protect us and the planet. That's why we are recognising skilled social care as essential infrastructure and investing in care jobs as green jobs for the future.

We want a job-rich, low-carbon, worker-led transformation: from childcare workers to engineers, technicians to adult care workers, solar installers to building retrofitters, car manufacturers to environmental enforcement – the Alliance Green New Deal will pave the way for thousands of new jobs across Northern Ireland and will ensure all of us benefit from a new green economy.

Our proposals could create over 50,000 new jobs over this decade. Significant areas of potential increased employment and new jobs include:

- The roll-out of advanced broadband and digital infrastructure.
- Environmental governance, auditing, and monitoring requirements.
- Education and training infrastructure.
- The caring economy, from childcare to adult social care.
- Green economy research and development.
- Manufacturing of green technologies.
- Retrofitting of housing for renewable energy sources and insulation.
- Renewable energy and broader transmission infrastructure.
- Heat pump installation.
- Rail construction and rail network expansion.
- Electric and hydrogen bus manufacturing.
- Installation, maintenance, and upgrade of new technology and infrastructure such as electric vehicle charging points.
- Afforestation and the protection and development of biodiversity.
- Tourist opportunities linked to a green Northern Ireland.

Financing the Green New Deal

Alliance believes that a significant UK-wide economic stimulus and investment-led green recovery are required, and investment in the traditional drivers of economic growth, namely skills, research & development, and infrastructure, must be accelerated and considered through the lens of a green transition.

From the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there is consensus among global experts for an investment-led, green recovery that can be sustained through government borrowing.

Such a package from the UK Government would involve a mixture of tax breaks and public spending. This increased spending would, in turn, bring very significant Barnett consequential for the Executive, allowing equivalent local measures to be introduced.



Green Governance

The Alliance Green New Deal would see Northern Ireland lead the way with its ambition by putting a just transition at the heart of our legislative process and civil service.

We will do this by:

- Creating a new Executive Department for Energy and Climate Change.
- Establishing an independent Environmental Protection Agency – an outstanding New Decade, New Approach commitment.
- Delivering an improved Northern Ireland Climate Change Act.
- Introducing a dedicated Environment Act for Northern Ireland to go further than the weak UK Environment Bill.
- Establishing an Economic Strategy which will support clean and inclusive growth and create sustainable jobs for the future.
- Playing a leadership role in international efforts to combat climate change and demonstrate our commitment to the Paris Agreement of 2015, by radically reducing emissions from the Northern Ireland economy.
- Legislating for carbon-neutral local government and incentivising renewables.
- Establishing citizens' assemblies to inspect policies tackling the climate emergency and make recommendations.

All-island Cooperation

Climate change doesn't respect borders and boundaries. Tackling the climate emergency requires global collective action, and bilateral cooperation between the UK and Ireland is crucial.

In particular, the Alliance Green New Deal will prioritise close cooperation between the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government in an all-island context. We believe that working together on areas such as agriculture, transport, and energy present huge opportunities to streamline and create services that better reflect how we live and work.

Areas for all-island cooperation include:

- Implementing the second North-South Interconnector and further development of the integrated single electricity market to maximise the use of renewables, while improving energy security and keeping prices competitive.
- Developing all-island transport connectivity, including high-speed rail between Belfast and Dublin, and onto Cork and Limerick.
- Enhancing all-island research and development collaboration, in particular using potential economies of scale to sustain large-scale projects.
- Coordinating agriculture and biodiversity policies.

Green Energy

Energy is central to all our lives, but to tackle the climate emergency and protect our environment for ourselves and future generations, we must leave the old ways of producing electricity and heat behind.

Northern Ireland has had notable success in recent years in renewable generation, surpassing, by a considerable margin, its 40% renewables target for 2020, setting up community energy initiatives and supporting innovative generation research projects. However, we can and must go further.

We believe Northern Ireland can be an ambitious world leader in energy efficiency and clean, net-zero technologies. For too long, energy and climate change policy in Northern Ireland has lacked ambition, direction and joined-up action. We have seen energy schemes waste public money through poor design and a lack of proper oversight in the past.

We must build on pioneering community energy initiatives that have brought environmental, social and economic benefits and restore public confidence in energy schemes.

Therefore, we will urgently establish a Department of Energy and Climate Change. This Department will tackle problems by:

- Having a single minister to champion energy and climate change issues at the Executive.
- Developing the proper oversight, expertise and administrative capacity to efficiently design and monitor clean energy schemes.
- Directing policy and implementation of energy generation and efficiency schemes through a single Executive department.
- Ensuring the integration of an Energy Strategy and climate change commitments across Executive departments.
- Working alongside further and higher education bodies to scope the potential of a green energy college, to target research, innovation and the necessary training for current and future jobs.

- Promoting citizen engagement and empowerment in energy demand reduction, generation and supply, and actively encouraging changes to reduce energy use and Northern Ireland's carbon footprint.
- Expanding the remit of the Utility Regulator consider climate change policies for governance.

We will also establish an independent energy commission for Northern Ireland to provide expert advice and recommendations to the Assembly and Executive on the pathway to zero-carbon energy and scrutinise progress.

The Alliance Green New Deal has huge ambitions for the new department. Our energy policies will:

- Set ambitious plans to reach the Alliance secured target for 80% renewable electricity generation by 2030, and 95% renewable electricity generation by 2035.
- Require all Executive departments to consider climate and the energy transition in policy development, to ensure all of government is working together towards our zero-carbon energy future.
- Implement an immediate statutory ban on all current and future fossil fuel exploration, including fracking, leaving the energy sources of yesterday in the ground.
- Prioritise the passage of planning applications that propose increasing the renewable energy capacity of Northern Ireland.
- Introduce comprehensive support and incentives for renewable generation.
- Fund necessary investment in the grid, including the second North-South Interconnector and other cross-border interconnection projects with Great Britain and France, to further develop the integrated Single Electricity Market to its full potential, ensure security of supply, stabilise prices, and quickly bring new renewables online.

- Invest in making Northern Ireland a world-leader in emerging hydrogen technologies, promoting innovative projects producing hydrogen gas and alternative blends, and researching how it can play a part in meeting challenges with energy storage, home heating and transport.
- Resource research and development and utilising our local university expertise regarding strategic future energy challenges such as energy storage, geothermal projects, carbon capture, storage and use, district heating solutions, and off-shore technologies.
- Oppose applications for the development of storage of non-renewable energy sources.



Planning and Housing

Retrofitting is a fundamental component of decarbonising the residential sector, building healthy homes and abolishing energy poverty.

The Alliance Green New Deal will develop an ambitious retrofitting programme with implementation by 2030. We will:

- Ensure the retrofitting of all social housing for renewable energy sources and insulation, creating many new jobs.
- Introduce universal access to grants, loans and advice from a single authority for insulating and future-proofing our housing stock.
- Expand grant programs to encourage retrofitting of older homes, whether rented or owned.
- Make retrofitting public and civic buildings a mandatory requirement.
- Encourage clusters of communities to sign up to retrofit programmes.
- Promote and offset costs for air and ground-source heat pumps, high-efficiency boilers, and other low or zero-emission technologies for the rapid decarbonisation of domestic heating.
- Roll out smart meters to electricity consumers, as has been widely done in Great Britain.
- Reform building regulations with nearly zero-energy buildings (NZEB); retrofitting grants; post-occupancy reviews; and requirements for new builds to sustain 100 years minimum.

The Alliance Green New Deal will also prioritise fundamental changes to planning, housing and construction. We will:

- Assist councils in preparing their Local Development Plans, ensuring consistency with the Regional Development Strategy and encouraging a healthy density of socially mixed and inclusive housing based around the needs of communities and the environment.
- Ensure new developments are better connected for active travel and reduce travel emissions via developer contributions as required.
- Permit development rights for green energy infrastructure, following the example of electric car charging points.
- Provide grants or loans to incentivise new builds, with loan repayments linked to energy savings.
- Require new builds to make provision for electric vehicle charging and active travel.
- Promote the proper roll-out of Net-Zero Emissions Building requirements, including technical booklets to assist architects and the construction sector, moving towards net-zero carbon.
- Support the construction sector's decarbonisation through renewable sources of heat, power, and materials in the building process.
- Provide funding to support carbon-neutral passive housing projects and tiny house communities and encourage further carbon-neutral developments.
- Expand grant support to encourage repair and regeneration of listed buildings.
- Improve the reliability and quality assurance processes surrounding Energy Performance Certificates, exploring how rates can be used to incentivise EPC improvements, and raising the required standards for the private rental sector.
- Rewild urban residential areas to reduce air pollution and enhance our biodiversity.
- Ensure no reckless destruction by planning decisions in areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks.
- Ensure statutory consultees in the planning process are correctly resourced so that 21-day response deadlines are met to consider critical environmental considerations.
- Reform the Pre-Application Community Consultation process, including a tighter timeframe and provision for physical and virtual consultations.

TRANSFORMATION	44
WAITING LISTS	44
MISSION	45
CONTEXT	45
FOCUS	45
SYSTEM	46
HEALTH DELIVERY	46
SOCIAL CARE	50
COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY SECTOR	50

CHAPTER 6 HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE



HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

Our health service is in crisis. It is struggling to meet the needs of our people and waiting lists are spiralling. Alliance believes political leadership is needed to implement reforms, so that the health service will still be universal and free at the point of use for future generations.

Our vision is of an effective, world-class system of health and social care, with a focus on: prevention and early intervention; access to the most modern diagnostics, treatments and technologies; providing community-based solutions where possible; and a preference for locally-accessible services supported by acute hospitals that deliver excellence.

We also recognise that health outcomes lie in a cross Departmental and cross-sectoral approach that addresses social inequalities,

promotes public health, provides educational and employment opportunities, and focuses on public safety. Greater investments in these areas can often deliver a greater return than direct investment in health and social services.

Alliance has published ambitious plans for the reform of our health service in our 'Fighting Fit' document, with policy proposals on a wide range of issues, from the aims and principles of our health and social care system to the workforce, and from preventative health to a specific women's health strategy.

A summary outline and a broader approach to a number of services are outlined below. To read the plans in full please follow https://www.allianceparty.org/fighting_fit.

TRANSFORMATION

We fully support 'Systems and Structures', the report of the Expert Panel chaired by Professor Rafael Bengoa. This means change – moving on from the old ways of doing things and embracing the most up-to-date services and systems.

However, when we talk about transformation, we do not just mean reform of the administration of health and social care. We mean a root and branch reform of how every department relates to issues affecting health and well-being and indeed how we all, as active citizens, think of them. We see real opportunities to combine the transformation agenda with the rebuild of the health service as we emerge from the pandemic.

WAITING LISTS

Our waiting lists are far too long because too many people are referred onto them in the first place, rather than being diagnosed or treated quickly along the most appropriate pathway.

The Bengoa reforms are about changing this so that people are seen as part of a **'population health' model**, overseen by multi-disciplinary teams and GP Federations responding to an area of around 100,000 people.

We strongly support the Bengoa reforms, focused on **providing diagnostics and treatment far more quickly**, often within primary care itself. Bringing down waiting lists in this way, accompanied by a system-wide approach to regional specialisms, will make the whole of Health and Social Care more efficient and responsive. We are frustrated that the reforms have proceeded so slowly so far.

We need more Alliance MLAs so that together we can push for these reforms to be implemented faster, driving waiting lists down and ensuring people have access to appropriate support, diagnostics and treatment far more quickly.

MISSION

Our mission for services is a high-quality health and well-being system, with diagnostics, treatment and information provided universally.

This is not currently the case. Waiting lists are now so extensive that many services are effectively unavailable, and people are often receiving emergency treatment rather than early intervention. One result of this is that people who can afford to go private do so, while people who can't are forced to wait – exacerbating inequalities and rendering the system not universal, but creating a two-tier system.

CONTEXT

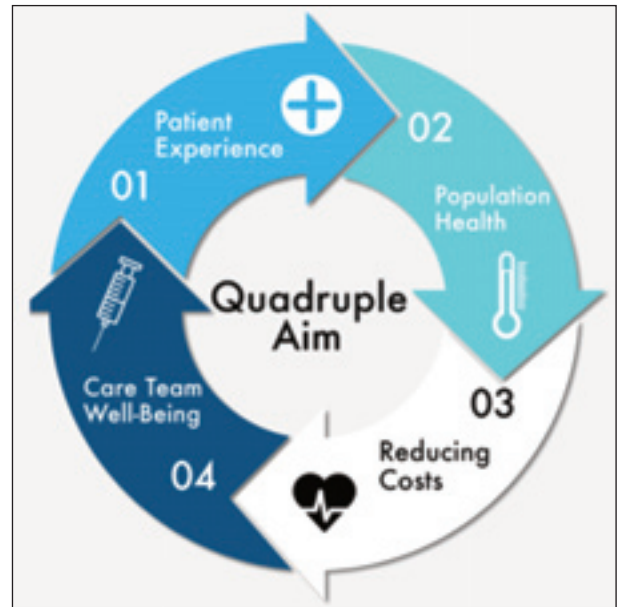
To change the context, we will:

- Ensure that every Programme for Government has the promotion of good health and well-being as a top priority for all departments, and that the outcomes-based approach has this priority woven through it.
- Re-shape public debate towards the steps we need to take for a Health Service which is genuinely loyal to NHS Principles.
- Recognise, in all we do, that what is required is not to protect but to reform Health and Social Care so that they actually meet NHS principles and provide a truly universal service.



FOCUS

To change the focus we will pursue a reform agenda based on the 'Quadruple Aim'.



We will pursue a patient experience that is much more about prevention, early intervention and the right treatment – expertly provided – including via:

- System-wide specialist hubs and clinics.
- Common standards for GPs (including online bookings).
- Alignment and prioritisation of First Responders as part of primary care.
- Reforms to end reliance of the private sector as a safety valve.
- Assessment Information Standards and a Sign Language Act so everyone can access their own information.

Population Health means focusing on the general well-being of the population as a whole in everything we do, including through:

- Audits to improve information and data collection so that interventions can be properly assessed.
- 'Well-being proofing' of legislation to ensure positive impact on health is a priority in all law-making.
- Social Prescribing Hubs and better co-ordination of care and welfare.
- A new Women's Strategy, additional Intervention Framework and enhanced Mental Health Strategy.

- Reform of the safeguarding system and investment in active citizenship, particularly around harm reduction.

Reducing the costs means advocating:

- A single system consisting of interconnected specialist and regional hubs.
- Enhanced scrutiny of spending and clinical governance.
- Improved e-health and online prescription/booking systems.
- Enhanced diagnostics.
- Reformed care financing based on individual need.

Care team well-being includes a range of measures – such as improved pay, safer staffing legislation, enhanced workforce planning and a broader bursary system – designed to demonstrate to staff that they are valued and to encourage people to work directly for Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

SYSTEM

To change the system we want to see the Transformation Agenda adopted by the entire Executive – not just as a series of projects but as a fundamental reform of how we think about health and wellbeing.

This should include a new system of managing transformation itself, including an independent commission wholly separate from the Department of Health to replace the RQIA as the regulator of care homes and an Independent Scrutiny Board to assess performance, improve communications, identify gaps in data and enhance the overall delivery of reform.

HEALTH DELIVERY

Alliance will prioritise and reform healthcare so that we have a genuinely universal system that improves life expectancy, well-being and general population health. In addition to our ambitious proposals for reform, we will continue to work with allied health professionals to focus on delivery of key areas.

Mental Health

We believe that mental health should be placed at the core of the public health agenda. Mental health conditions affect around 1 in 4 people at some stage in their lives and, due to the legacy of the Troubles, mental health conditions are more prevalent in Northern Ireland than in neighbouring jurisdictions.

Mental well-being has social, health and economic impacts including on education, employment, social inclusion, physical health, recovery from mental and physical illness, self-harm and suicide risk, participation in public life and contact with the criminal justice system. Tackling the stigma and discrimination which is still associated with mental illness must be made a priority throughout society.

To ensure a more complete, holistic approach to tackling our crisis in mental health and prevent crises for people moving forward, we will take the following steps:

- Implementation of a fully-funded ten year mental health strategy, an associated workforce review and collaboration with allied health professionals and the third sector.
- Transitional mental health services for young people aged 18-25.
- Mental health First Aid training to be delivered to all schools, public bodies and workplaces.
- Separate Emergency Department for those in mental health crisis.
- Commitment to the evaluation and roll out of MATT (Multi Agency Triage Teams).
- Mental health walk in hubs for people, targeted at meeting the needs of people who are at levels one and two: not requiring full psychiatric care, but supporting people to avail of help at an early stage.

- Delivery of a mother and baby unit in Northern Ireland for inpatient treatment for the post-natal mental health crisis.
- Trauma Informed Services, based on a replication of the Scottish Model in which mental health priorities are placed at the centre of public services (for example, social security applications, housing applications, educational and careers advice services).
- Endorsement of the 123GP Campaign.

Infant and Children’s Mental Health

The need for investment in early years is supported by a wealth of research and evidence. In addition to the support provided by essential services like SureStart, mental health services directed at an early age are critical in ensuring the best start for infants and children.

The pandemic has exacerbated the need for investment in mental health services for young people. Isolation and being unable to socialise have impacted infants and children drastically. Investment in services needs a whole system response, including specialised services for those most at risk. Alliance will:

- Embed a multidisciplinary, cross-departmental approach to prioritise and improve infant mental health.
- Endorse the key recommendations of the Stronger from the Start infant mental health campaign.
- Develop and fund an infant and early childhood workforce strategy.
- Increase funding allocation for children and adolescent mental health actions from the Mental Health Strategy 2021-31.
- Endorse the ‘Elephant in the Room Campaign’ and introduce a youth-led mental health campaign, challenging the culture of silence and negative stigma.
- Work with young people to develop a new and positive language around mental health by creating a ‘mental health dictionary’ which could be used as part of a mental health curriculum programme.

- Create a compulsory curriculum programme for all schools and colleges on mental health and wellbeing that helps to raise awareness and challenge stigma and allows young people to access consistent mental health information.
- Create a website for young people, designed by young people, to provide mental health information, support, and to raise awareness and challenge stigma.
- Ensure no young person waits too long for counselling services, through increasing the sustainability of long term workforce planning and working with the third sector.

Alcohol and Drug Misuse

Alliance recognises the need to invest in the causes of alcohol and drug misuse, starting with the implementation of the anti-poverty strategy. We also recognise the complex interplay between addiction, substance misuse and mental health.

Alcohol and drug misuse impacts upon the economy and the life opportunities of individuals affected. We recognise the pressures this places on our health and criminal justice systems. Alliance will address this by:

- Supporting the supply of safe injection spaces, and needle exchange programmes, such as those run by independent organisations.
- Reviewing the current availability of support services, treatment pathways and commissioning of drug and alcohol interventions, including dual diagnosis and court-mandated interventions.
- Implementing minimum unit pricing for alcohol.
- Supporting advancements in research and prescription of cannabis-based medicinal products, especially for neurological conditions.
- Working across Executive departments to facilitate early intervention, particularly for those at risk of offending due to substance abuse issues.

Cancer

By 2040, the number of cases of cancer per year is set to rise 45% in males and 58% in females, according to the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry. Alliance understands the devastating impact of the pandemic on cancer care in Northern Ireland. We want to make early cancer detection a priority.

We have set out our proposals for the transformation of the health service, including actions on cancer prevention and treatment. Multi-year Executive budgets will provide a greater level of stability and ensure, with cancer services in particular, the delivery of the next phase of Cancer Nurse Specialist expansion.

In addition to these proposals and those within our detailed health strategy, we will do the following:

- Commit to a fully resourced Cancer Strategy to ensure the delivery of its recommendations.
- Ensure long-term demand based modelling approach to commissioning services.
- Introduce personalised integrated care for everyone with cancer, ensuring a holistic needs assessment and signposting onto emotional, practical and financial support in their community.
- Introduce annual publishing of progress reports on closing health inequalities in cancer care.
- Deliver a strategic transformation of palliative and end of life care through delivering cancer strategy actions to ensure everyone who needs it can access integrated and personalised care when and where they need it.
- Enact healthy public policy which empowers healthier individuals, communities and society by:
 - Tackling health inequalities.
 - Developing a new Skin Cancer Strategy.
 - Developing a new Tobacco Control “End game” Strategy.
 - Developing a new Obesity Strategy.
- Prioritise early diagnosis and screening of lung cancer.
- Support the urgent introduction of HPV screening as part of the cervical cancer screening programme.

Cardiovascular and Respiratory Health

Alliance are committed to delivering more stable, sustainable services in cardiovascular and respiratory health that would enable better outcomes for patients.

We supported the roll out of Emergency Life Support (ELS) skills training and the availability of defibrillators in public places. We will aim to ensure that, whether through local government or policy intervention in the department of health, these are more widely accessible.

We will:

- Develop a Stroke Strategy.
- Urgently progress the commitments in Reshaping Stroke Care and set out revised targets for achieving these commitments.
- Invest in and roll-out a new, long term rehabilitation and support pathway to meet the needs of people affected by cardiovascular and respiratory health issues.
- Improve the detection and treatment of major risk factors for stroke by investing in and implementing ambitious stroke prevention plans.

Women's Health

Through the establishment of a Women's Health Strategy, we will implement the following:

- Better resourcing for investigative diagnostics for gynaecology and improved care pathways for conditions such as endometriosis.
- Specialist menopause clinics.
- The maximisation of opportunities to unite menopause, sexual health and fertility clinics, allowing women to access services such as smear tests and reproductive advice in the same location.
- Improved screening for female cancers.
- Enhanced and more informative birth control services that empower women.
- A single IVF system meeting standards elsewhere in the UK.
- A post-natal 'MOT' which includes assessing maternal physical and mental well-being.

Men's Health

In addition to the proposed interventions with respect to male cancers contained in the *Cancer* section above, Alliance supports the call for a Men's Health Strategy to promote early intervention for men, including accessing mental health services. In particular, there is a need for better understanding and interventions relating to the increased rate of suicide among men.

Long-term Conditions

Alliance supports the need to recognise the impact of long term conditions, both physical and mental.

We need to better understand the complexities of long term health conditions, both in terms of their effect on physical and mental health and their ability to limit or impact a person's daily life.

We will:

- Create a strategy to include the issues of individual conditions, self-management and management of chronic pain.
- Take forward a review of the current provision for those living with Tourette's in Northern Ireland, with the aim of a co-designed and co-produced Tourette's strategy.
- Introduce improved treatment pathways for those with Long COVID and assess the effectiveness of the post-COVID hubs.

Surgical Hubs

Alliance will introduce more thriving surgical hubs on COVID-light sites to ensure services are not 'stood down' again. COVID-light sites will be key for maximising optimal surgical activity alongside the protection of surgical beds. Surgical teams enabled to deliver maximum performance and efficiencies will be able to address the backlog quicker and help reduce waiting times that are at unacceptable levels.

We will work towards full implementation of the Elective Care Framework, alongside regular reporting on waiting lists.

Dentistry

Alliance is committed to securing access to NHS dental care for all and supports advice and prevention programmes to tackle poor oral health in Northern Ireland. To this end, Alliance will:

- Develop an ambitious Oral Health Strategy to deliver better oral health for all.
- Address the funding crisis through a long-term sustainable investment model to ensure quality care and prevention to the general population.
- Explore ways to incentivise commitment to health service dentistry.
- Ensure dental school places keep pace with demand.
- Deliver a joined-up Dental Workforce Strategy to address chronic shortages of dental nurses and vacancies in hospital dentistry, and to rebuild morale within the profession.

Carers

Alliance supports the invaluable work that over 220,000 carers do across Northern Ireland, many of whom themselves have health conditions or disabilities.

The pandemic highlighted the burden the government places on carers when services are reduced or completely withdrawn, for example, the removal of day centre provision. Access to support services and employment are vital for the safety and well-being of carers and those they care for. We support the creation of a carer's register and enhanced support for those unpaid carers across the region.

Rehabilitation

Alliance supports the Community Rehabilitation Alliance's call for a Rehabilitation Framework, including physiotherapy, and will seek to introduce one as early as possible. This will ensure collaboration between statutory and third sector bodies in providing a right to rehab for patients.

SOCIAL CARE

Care work is essential, skilled work that deserves to be well paid, secure and valued. In particular, as people live for longer, there is a need to ensure quality and dignity of care in the services provided through social care.

Adult social care is a core component of our health system, often preventing people from requiring acute hospital services. Alliance is committed to funding and treating adult social care as an integral part of the NHS.

We commit to implement the following:

- A full public inquiry into the pandemic response in care homes.
- Sufficient visits from domiciliary care workers, including introducing minimum durations for care visits.
- An urgent review of the Children's Services Cooperation Act.
- Ensuring that the needs of patients at Muckamore Abbey Hospital are assessed and more suitable accommodation provided, where appropriate.
- Connecting those living alone in the community with the community and voluntary sector through social prescribing.
- Replacement of the current RQIA with an independent commission, separate from the Department of Health.
- Addressing social work recruitment and retention pressures.
- Introduction of a statutory Duty of Candour.
- A meaningful career path for social care, with better opportunities for progression, proper training opportunities and professional recognition.

- Implement a review of the 'Care Review Process' with input from young people in care into the standards of the process.
- Introduction of a Care Review, similar to that in Scotland, with commitments for the implementation of agreed reforms as soon as possible, including:
 - A care leavers' payment when a young person is formally leaving care in Northern Ireland.
 - A standardised model of support for transitional arrangements for care leavers.

COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Vital services within health are provided by the community and voluntary sector (CVS). Without these services, there would be a greater reliance on inpatient settings in hospitals. Whether cancer support networks like Cancer Focus, or step-down services provided by the British Red Cross, there must be greater support from government for the integration and sustainability of these services.

Shifting healthcare from focusing on reactive and hospital-based treatment in favour of preventative, community-based care would help to reduce the impact of health inequalities and alleviate some of the well-documented challenges facing the health and social care system.

We will invest in addressing people's non-clinical needs throughout the health and social care system, including increasing funding of community-based health and social care. We support checking people's practical, social, psychological, physical and financial needs when leaving hospital.

A NEW & STRATEGIC ECONOMIC APPROACH	52
ECONOMIC POLICIES & DELIVERY STRUCTURES	53
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF LOCAL BUSINESSES	53
TOWN CENTRES & HIGH STREETS	54
SOCIAL ECONOMY	54
SKILLS	55
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT	57
EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS	58



CHAPTER 7 **ECONOMY & SKILLS**

ECONOMY & SKILLS

We want 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.

Alliance believes that despite the challenges facing us, Northern Ireland has the resources to emerge from the pandemic stronger and more competitive. Our strengths far outweigh our weaknesses. We have an enterprising and resilient business foundation, a relatively young and skilled population, a strong

manufacturing base, excellence in research and innovation, leading communications infrastructure, significant international links and unique scenery and culture.

We must build on our emerging strengths in terms of fintech, cyber, pharma and the creative industries, while enhancing our underlying base in advanced manufacturing, agri-food, retail and hospitality. Within an open and market-based economy, businesses are the core creators of employment and prosperity. To support this, we must invest in the key economic drivers of innovation, infrastructure and skills.

A NEW & STRATEGIC ECONOMIC APPROACH

We need political agreement on a new economic approach. This should be underpinned through a new Economic Strategy, and an associated commitment to a Green New Deal.

The current 10X Economic Vision document is not a formal economic strategy. It should be upgraded to a full economic strategy, focusing on job protection and creation in the short-term, as well as setting out a clear long-term strategy for inclusive growth, increased productivity and greater competitiveness that builds on our key strengths. A central element of this strategy must be a plan to invest in key economic drivers such as skills and physical and digital infrastructure, to ensure competitive energy supplies, to provide a proportionate regulatory framework, and to embrace a Green New Deal.

We will ensure that strategic and outcome-based approaches for economic development are included in the Programme for Government.

Any new economic strategy should be supported by a range of associated strategies including:

- Skills Strategy.
- Manufacturing Strategy.
- Hospitality Strategy.
- Energy Strategy.
- Social Enterprise Strategy.
- Agri-food Strategy.

Continued investment in our infrastructure is critical to future economic development. Our infrastructure plans can be found in the **Infrastructure** chapter of this manifesto. Similarly, the energy policy is contained in the **Green New Deal** chapter.

Alliance will also continue to challenge UK regional imbalances and the absence of a genuine UK-wide regional economic strategy.

ECONOMIC POLICIES & DELIVERY STRUCTURES

We must ensure that Northern Ireland offers the best possible environment for investors from abroad. This is more than simply lowering costs, it is about ensuring the right type and volume of skills are in place, supportive infrastructure, and an absence of political violence and instability.

Alliance will:

- Ensure a targeted approach to inward investment which targets key industries and sectors that will support the growth of local business, build on our competitive strengths and create high value jobs.
- Encourage an equitable regional and social distribution of investment and other economic opportunities.
- Implement the conclusions of the review of Invest NI.
- Deliver the new Skills Strategy.
- Ensure that Invest NI markets the opportunities for Northern Ireland arising from the dual market access under the Protocol.
- Develop a social enterprise strategy, underpinned by a Social Value Act for Northern Ireland, empowering us to enact social and economic change through procurement.
- Establish a green economy taskforce to inform the Executive of crucial policy interventions, with membership including environmental and economic experts, representatives from trade unions, community groups, and local business organisations.
- Develop a Green Investment Unit for Invest NI to look at sustainability across all Invest NI projects and to attract green economy investments, including collaboration on skills and training.

SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF LOCAL BUSINESSES

One of Northern Ireland's strengths is its entrepreneurial local businesses. It needs to become easier for companies to be formed and be supported, to access the necessary skills, and where appropriate to increase exports.

Alliance will:

- Review and simplify business support infrastructure.
- Continue to work with local banks and financial institutions to facilitate easy access to finance.
- Promote easier access to venture capital and ensure that Invest NI raises awareness of the equity funding market in Northern Ireland, across the business base.
- Adopt a proportionate approach to regulation and streamline or consolidate where possible.
- Support the development of incubation and cluster zones by working with businesses and local councils to identify suitable sites.
- Ensure the continued roll-out of high-speed internet to support small businesses.
- Address the issues of security of energy supply and energy efficiency which have a direct impact on the cost of running a business in Northern Ireland.
- Publish performance of government departments and public sector agencies on prompt payment.
- Consider amendments to procurement rules that make it easier for small businesses to bid.

TOWN CENTRES & HIGH STREETS

Vibrant town and city centres and high streets are central to the economic vibrancy and social fabric of communities. The pandemic and resulting economic downturn has been hard on many local shopping and business districts, and many streets in Northern Ireland now have a significant number of vacant commercial premises.

Alliance believes that if the economic recovery is going to benefit everybody, every community in Northern Ireland must have the opportunity to fulfil its economic potential. This means that as well as investing in big projects, we must invest in town centres, high streets, local districts and urban villages.

The high street will not be the same as it has been in the past and we will need to reconsider what we want it to look like. This will mean a mix of shops, cafes and restaurants, residential properties and non-retail businesses. This will help to ensure vibrant community economies despite trends towards out-of-town retail centres and internet shopping.

To address this, Alliance will:

- Develop a comprehensive strategy to rejuvenate high streets and town centres, and persuade the Executive to introduce funding reforms where necessary.
- Introduce a cross-departmental Hospitality Strategy to address the specific challenges and opportunities from that sector.
- Work with councils to ensure that they establish a formal mechanism to hear the voice of businesses in their new community planning process.
- Reform the rates system, including the potential expansion of the Small Business Rate Relief and making it easier for businesses to set up in vacant premises and promote growth.
- Develop Business Improvement Districts, whereby businesses fund regeneration in their area through a levy on business rates.
- Prioritise town centres, rather than out-of-town retail centres, as the preferred sites for retail and business development.

SOCIAL ECONOMY

Alliance has long supported the social economy and social enterprises. They have an important role to play in regenerating our communities by providing skills, employment and building up social capital.

To support the social economy Alliance will:

- Push for a comprehensive approach to the social economy with a dedicated Social Economy Strategy. This strategy would recognise the work the community and voluntary sector does in areas such as welfare provision, skills provision and early prevention of social problems. It would also assist the sector with volunteer recruitment and access to sustainable funding.
- Examine other public finance arrangements which provide greater scope for social enterprises and development trusts.
- Underpin these developments with a Social Value Act.

SKILLS

Skills are a key driver of economic and social change in our society. They are central to increasing productivity and making our economy more open, flexible and competitive. They will facilitate the rebuilding and, especially, the rebalancing of our economy, most crucially in a more knowledge-based and export focused direction.

Raising skills levels can lead to improvements in standards of living, and is therefore linked to decreased inequalities and to increased social mobility.

Demand is rising for intermediate higher-level skills, in particular for STEM and Management and Leadership.

As the provision of skills serves as the engine-room of the economy, it is important to maximise the efficiency of the economy through provision of skills at the right levels, matching supply with demand, and bringing as many people as possible into the labour market.

While over recent years there have been considerable improvements in skill outcomes, Northern Ireland is still characterised by its long-running structural problems of:

- Too many people with low or no qualifications, and lower overall skill levels compared to neighbouring jurisdictions and international competitors.
- Too many of our young people leaving education without the security of a full-time job or unable to find employment that utilises their training.
- Relatively poor levels of productivity.
- Workers receiving less training while in employment than any other region of the UK.
- The highest rate of economic inactivity in the UK, and the lowest level of economic participation.
- Structural problems with long-term unemployment and economic inactivity.

Skills are currently delivered through universities, further education colleges, and private sector providers, alongside ongoing training and development in the workplace. The greatest pressures will likely continue focus on intermediate technical and professional skills at Levels 4 and 5.

The new Skills Strategy will drive up skills levels across all levels, and ensure skills provision more closely aligns with the requirements of employers and the wider economy. It will ensure everyone's access to opportunities, regardless of gender, age, disability, socioeconomic, and ethnic background. This includes providing new and emerging opportunities for people starting their careers and those who wish to retrain.

The Skills Strategy should be a cross-departmental commitment for the entire Executive rather than just the responsibility of the Department for the Economy.

To make this plan viable, Alliance is committed to significant additional investment in skills over the course of the next mandate. This will involve: addressing the funding deficits in higher education and investing for future demands; increasing the resources available to a business-focused Further Education sector; apprenticeships and youth training; and expanding the Assured Skills programme that directly addresses the needs of investors. We want to devolve the Apprenticeship Levy so that we can reinvest the money raised directly in skills.

To support improved skills outcomes, Alliance will:

- Implement the existing apprenticeship and youth training strategies, including a strong role for employers.
- Deliver the Further Education Strategy - 'FE Means Success' including consolidating the dual economic and social role played by colleges, and encouraging their role in community planning.
- Address funding inequalities in Further Education.
- Introduce Lifelong Learning Guarantee, including a free entitlement to Level 3 study.
- Undertake a Review of Vocational Qualifications.

- Introduce a revised strategy for management and leadership skills.
- Deliver 14-19 Strategy in order to effectively bridge the interface between school and college, apprenticeships and youth training.
- Undertake a fresh Higher Education Strategy and a new Widening Participation Strategy, including how to further improve research and teaching excellence, addressing barriers to access, working more closely with employers including further development of degree level apprenticeships, and partnership with FE Colleges.
- Provide a clear delineation of the role and functions of universities and colleges.
- Intensify support for STEM in higher education and further education, including promotion Women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), with targets to have at least 30% representation by 2030.
- Review and expand support for part-time and postgraduate study.
- Further investment in supported PhD places.
- Deliver a single, integrated system of teacher training for Northern Ireland.
- Incentivise employment with wage subsidy-based employment schemes through the introduction of a green economy weighting.

Alliance accepts that the current funding and delivery model for higher education in Northern Ireland is currently unsustainable. We will work to achieve a viable financial solution that also preserves our strong track record on access. This outcome must be long-term and be backed by a strong political consensus.

Alliance believes that tuition fees can continue to be frozen in line with inflation, provided that the Executive is prepared to address the resulting funding requirements. Consideration should also be given to the diversification of the traditional higher education model, and the identification of other potential sources of finance.

Skills for the Green Economy

Just 20 years ago, many of the jobs we do today didn't exist. Many of us change jobs and careers several times throughout our lives, and this trend is likely to accelerate. We need to invest in and develop energy and environmental skills.

To ensure we can access the jobs of tomorrow, new skills interventions should:

- Develop employer-led green apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for all ages, and all educational and employment backgrounds.
- Consider wage subsidies for green apprenticeships in certified areas.
- Create a dedicated green economy retraining allowance, open to every adult wishing to access new green employment opportunities.
- Create targeted bursaries for under-represented groups in the labour market to access new and emerging industries, including disabled people, people of ethnic minority backgrounds, care leavers, for example.
- Conduct a review of vocational, professional and technical qualifications.
- Ensure green economy opportunities are embedded into careers advice.
- Utilise early warnings of redundancies to assess retraining requirements and match new opportunities.
- Provide a green skills challenge fund into which employers can make bids for financial support.

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Northern Ireland has a robust existing research and development (R&D) infrastructure involving universities, further education colleges, and science parks, alongside private companies. In some research areas, we are world leading. However, our research base needs to be bigger.

Alliance will ramp up investment in R&D to ensure Northern Ireland is a global leader in a range of key areas, including increasingly support for the green economy.

Additional investment in R&D will be crucial in developing the green economy and new jobs. Particular opportunities lie in:

- Renewable energy.
- Hydrogen development and deployment.
- Green Aerospace.
- Battery technology.
- Food and agriculture.
- Smart materials.
- Digital technology.

In addition to increased funding from within the Block Grant, we should explore other innovative funding sources, including City Deals and maximising drawdowns from EU Programmes such as Horizon Europe.

We must, therefore, further develop the existing NI Contact Network to overcome the separation arising from Brexit. There should also be the provision of a green R&D challenge fund into which employers can make bids for financial support.

Alliance will advocate for increased resourcing of UK research councils and other programmes, and seek guarantees of more equitable funding across the UK. We must also maximise all-island research collaboration.



EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where employment law and employment relations policy and practice are devolved. While taking into account developments in Great Britain and the need on occasions for a common framework and approach, we have used our capacity to shape employment law and relations policy to take account of our particular circumstances and preferences.

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. Changes in employment law should be informed by a social partnership approach across businesses and trade unions.

Pre-pandemic, the gig economy was an increasing feature of our employment landscape. Alliance has long called for regulation in the gig economy because every worker deserves to be treated with dignity and have financial independence.

A spotlight has also been shone on issues in the childcare system. Moving to a green society and economy in which everyone can participate requires universal, child-centred childcare to meet families' and providers' needs.

The pandemic has presented some potential useful benefits for addressing climate change: we know that greater home working levels are possible and preferable for many. We must preserve new-found flexibilities for those who want them. In turn, these trends pose fresh challenges for employment law to ensure that changing patterns of work do not create new forms of exploitation.

The Employment Act 2016 provides a platform to continue to improve employment relations, and to engage in a broad range of regulation. However, we will need to go further with additional legislation.

Alliance will:

- Eliminate zero-hour contracts and introduce robust regulation of the gig economy.
- Review and strengthen rights to flexible and at-home working and protections for those in that context.
- Encourage condensed hours by employers for those wishing to avail, where it is practical to do so.
- Introduce a universal childcare system to meet the needs of families, subsidised by Government and centred on the child, ensuring that women and low-income families can fully participate in the new green economy.
- Implement regulations on mandatory gender and ethnicity pay gap reporting for all employers with more than 50 employees, including a duty to produce an action plan.
- Ban companies from “fire and rehire” practices which have increased during the pandemic.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION	60
EARLY YEARS & CHILDCARE	61
HARRY'S LAW	62
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	62
A COMPREHENSIVE, QUALITY CURRICULUM	63
SUPPORTING PUPILS & THEIR FAMILIES	64
STRUCTURES & BUILDINGS	64

CHAPTER 8 EDUCATION



EDUCATION

Alliance believes children should be educated together through a single, integrated education system that delivers equality of opportunity so that every child can develop their unique ability, personality and potential.

We have consistently highlighted the deep inequalities and inefficiencies in our sectoral and segregated education system. Through the negotiations that led to the New Decade, New Approach agreement we secured

commitment to an independent review of education; however, we have concerns regarding the establishment and composition of the panel, as it should have included non-sectoral experts in order to produce a truly independent review of our education system. Alliance would recast this panel to achieve an overarching and objective view of the future of education in Northern Ireland.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

In the absence of a single, integrated education system, Alliance believes every child should have the choice and option of attending an integrated school. Unfortunately, the demand for integrated places far exceeds those available. Polls suggest an overwhelming level of support across the population for integrated education, yet the formal integrated sector remains small.

Education in Northern Ireland continues to be provided on a predominately segregated basis. By contrast, in most other parts of Europe and further afield, a single, integrated public education system is the norm.

Integrated education delivers a range of financial, social and educational benefits, including:

- Reducing the cost of division and duplication within the education system.
- Directing funding towards pupils rather than the maintenance of the school estate.
- Allowing children to explore their identity and culture while learning about other identities.
- Making it easier to improve the quality of education and, therefore, address inequalities.

‘Shared education’, where two or more schools share facilities but do not fully integrate their pupils, has been promoted in recent years but it is no substitute for integrated education. Sharing must be a first step towards integration, rather than an end point in itself. Integrated education is a vehicle by which to drive reconciliation in our schools.

In the last mandate, Alliance secured the first transformative piece of legislation for Integrated Education in the Assembly’s history. Despite opposition from parties across the Assembly, the successful passing of the legislation will require:

- The Department of Education and the Education Authority to support, not merely encourage and facilitate, the development of integrated education. This will require the Department to ensure that resources are dedicated to the sector for this purpose.
- Proper auditing of demand for integrated education, of which the Department must take account in budgeting and planning decisions.
- An Integrated Education Strategy to be published six months after commencement of the Act, to report on its implementation.
- The Department to dedicate funding for the facilitation of integrated education.
- Teacher training providers to provide an all-inclusive module on how to teach in a truly inclusive and integrated classroom.

- A dedicated departmental resource to help schools strengthen their ethos and to make sure all integrated schools are putting the integrated ethos at the heart of everything they do.
- Integrated schools to be inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate team as part of their usual programme of inspections, to ensure they are upholding their integrated ethos.

In addition, Alliance legislated to ensure that teachers will, in future, be protected from religious discrimination in employment.

EARLY YEARS & CHILDCARE

Early years services and access to quality childcare and pre-school places are essential for children to have the best start in life.

Many professionals, countries and families look to Scandinavian nations as setting the standard for childcare, education and family life. The childcare provision in these countries are among the most generous in the world, supporting parents from the early days of pregnancy, to school and beyond. It recognises that childcare is a part of our economic infrastructure and is integral to child development.

Childcare provision benefits us all: parents, carers, employers, communities and, most importantly, children. It is vital the Executive introduces policies that safeguard the development of our youngest children and mitigate the long term effects that the lack of strategic policies have had on early education and childcare in the past.

Alliance will continue to implement the recommendations within the Fair Start report, ensuring cross-departmental collaboration and sharing of information to ensure an outcomes-based Executive strategy.

Alliance will also introduce the following policies:

- A Childcare Strategy, co-designed and co-produced by stakeholders and professionals which ensures the annual budget is spent well. This is an overdue commitment from New Decade, New Approach which must be realised.
- A full costed analysis of the resources required to deliver a full time, high quality childcare place.
- A universal, affordable childcare scheme, with fully funded hours paid directly to providers.
- An awareness campaign to provide families with the information on assistance for the financial costs of childcare.
- A review of SureStart funding and expanding to include the additional 22 areas targeted in 2021.
- Movement towards universal full-time provision for all pre-school children and a standardisation of the school day for these children.
- Enhancement of early childhood development with a focus on nurturing for pre-school aged settings, including nurture rooms, outdoor learning and play.

HARRY'S LAW

Alliance endorses the recommendations of the review of the use of restraint and seclusion in educational settings.

We commit to the introduction of 'Harry's Law', ending the use of seclusion in schools; and appropriate recording and monitoring of the use of restraint, in line with its place as an intervention of last resort; supported by training for staff in trauma informed ways to prevent, predict and de-escalate pupil distress behaviours.



SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

External and internal reviews have highlighted multiple failings in how children with special educational needs are supported. Our special schools are over capacity and under-resourced.

Alliance believes that children and young people with special educational needs should have access to quality education alongside support and therapies that meet their needs on a holistic basis, so they have the best opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Alliance will introduce:

- A statementing process that works to include early diagnosis within the time period of referral, early access to educational psychologists and statutory assessment of SEN requirements.
- A review of the number and training for Educational Psychologists.
- Adequate resourcing of implementation of statements in order that children can receive the support they need in class.
- Increased access to special school places and a new special school in the Belfast area.
- Mandatory autism teacher training.
- Upgrade of special school estate so children are taught in appropriate surroundings that genuinely meet their needs.
- Support for the right of children with disabilities to attend a school that is appropriate for them, whether mainstream or special needs.

A COMPREHENSIVE, QUALITY CURRICULUM

Alliance is committed to ensuring that pupil-centred learning and quality advice and guidance are fundamental within education provision. We all learn differently, and our education system must reflect individuals' learning needs and preferences.

It is unfair and unnecessary for our ten and eleven year old children to sit transfer tests or use academic criteria to transfer into a common curriculum in Key Stage 3.

Our education system should include adequate provision for technical, vocational and academic educational choices, with pupils free to 'mix and match' vocational and academic subjects.

In order to refresh the curriculum and ensure equality of education, we will:

- Consider the recommendations of the renewed panel on the Independent Review of Education.
- Use departmentally-directed criteria for post-primary transfer, with the introduction of legislation to ensure consistent application across Northern Ireland.
- Ensure a greater emphasis in outdoor learning, physical activity and play.
- Fully deliver the new 14-19 strategy and the development of parity of esteem with a greater mix of academic and vocational pathways.
- Initiate a review of vocational qualifications.
- Undertake a full and comprehensive review of the curriculum to ensure that a wide-range of academic and vocational options are available.
- Invest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) within schools and advancement of pupils' awareness of these subjects is important from an early stage, with a particular aim to increase uptake amongst female pupils.
- Invest in languages at primary school level to encourage greater uptake at key stage 3 and beyond to ensure pupils can enjoy and participate in a more globalised and connected world.
- Provide a wide range of computer programming training available in schools at all levels.
- Promote entrepreneurialism and business skills in schools.
- Teach first aid in schools so that more people have knowledge of these emergency and lifesaving skills.
- Provide greater emphasis on financial education through learning for life and work in post-primary schools.
- Introduce industry, world and relevant careers and guidance support within school to assist young people with educational pathway choices from 14 onwards, with equal access and opportunities for choices in GCSEs, BTEC or apprenticeship training.
- Introduce a standardised, evidence-based, inclusive Relationship and Sexuality Education programme through primary and post primary schools, through amending the Minimum Content Order.

SUPPORTING PUPILS & THEIR FAMILIES

One of the biggest challenges in the education system is making sure that the benefits of a quality education are available to everyone. This means that regardless of someone's background or perceived ability, they must be given the same chance to succeed.

We are deeply concerned about the underperformance of pupils from low income backgrounds and pupils with disabilities.

Additionally, mental health care must be a priority in our education system, both at school and within the home. This requires a range of direct and practical interventions to remove those existing barriers to their educational and well-being development.

Our interventions would include:

- Investing in programmes to tackle low levels of literacy and numeracy, starting with those schools with the highest need.
- Reviewing free school meal eligibility and eradicating holiday hunger in order to tackle underachievement. This could be funded through savings made by the development of integrated education.
- Providing programmes of intensive family support services for those most vulnerable children and their families.
- Providing a consistent programme to improve the accessibility of schools for pupils who have lower mobility.
- Reviewing the support available for lower-income pupils who may have difficulty affording school uniforms or other equipment, including a cap on school uniform fees.
- Providing ongoing support and training opportunities for teachers to ensure full inclusion of all children within the classroom.
- Assisting with removing communication barriers and support the work of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

- Reviewing the effectiveness of the 'Engage' programme with the intention of a permanent replacement to ensure those who need more one to one support receive it.
- Providing mental health support through counselling services and/or referral services within schools at both primary and secondary level.
- Ensuring the introduction of online safety education within schools.

STRUCTURES & BUILDINGS

Our education system is financially unsustainable and our education budget has become heavily skewed towards maintenance and running costs.

Alliance believes that pupils should always be at the centre of the school estate, rather than the buildings, and that the planning of school provision must be evidence-based.

We need to invest in the needs of pupils, using our schools estate efficiently and redirecting funds lost to the duplication and division in our education system.

To achieve sustainable reform of the schools estate, integrated education must be given an equal footing in the area planning process instead of the two main sectors planning for their sectors.

NATURE, WILDLIFE & BIODIVERSITY	67
NATIONAL PARKS	68
WASTE	68
AGRICULTURE	69
ANIMAL WELFARE	70

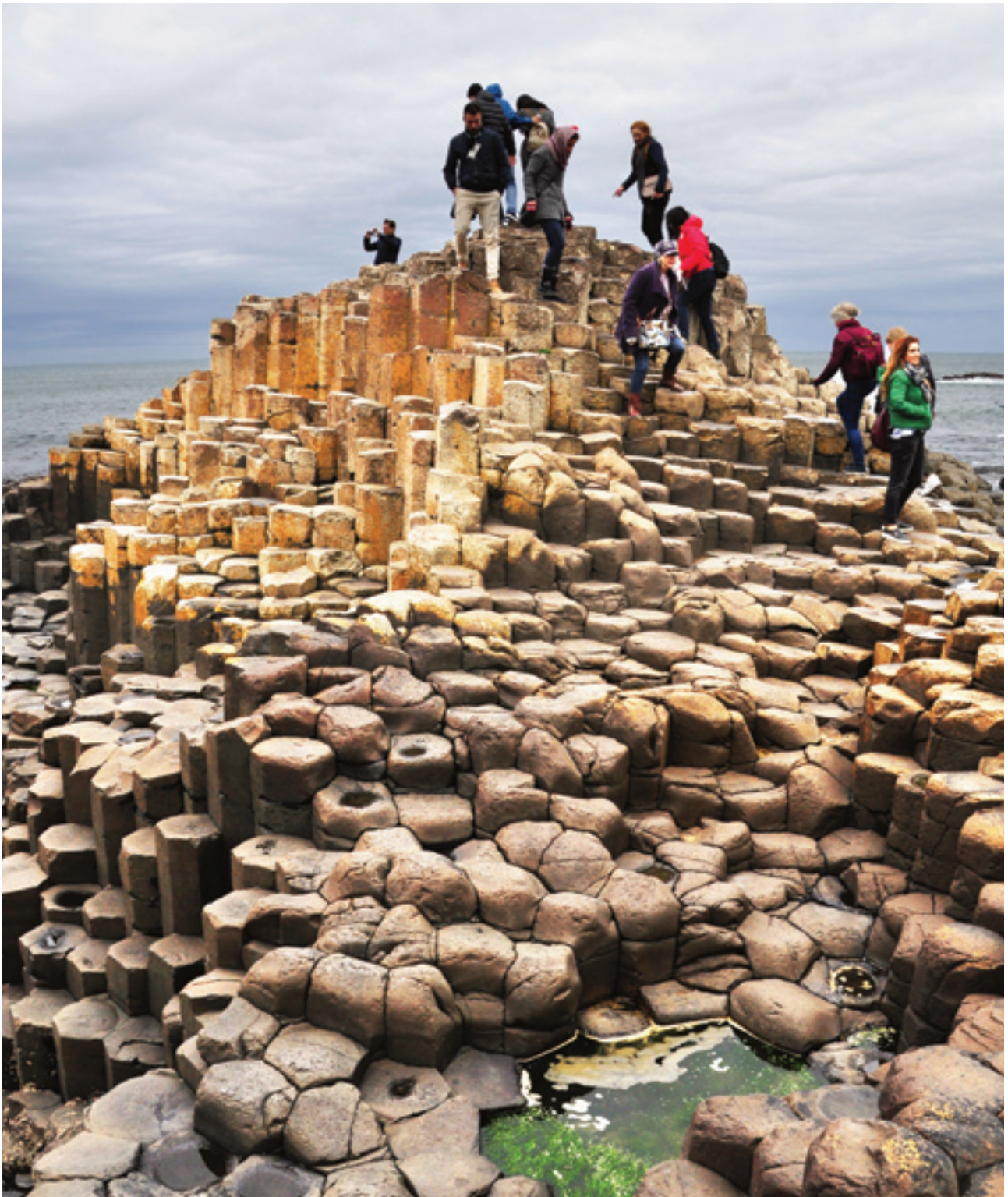
CHAPTER 9 **AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS**



AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & RURAL AFFAIRS

Tackling the climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of our time and the UK's target for net-zero emissions by 2050 is far too slow. We need radical reform to make sure Northern Ireland contributes to this global mission, including reducing carbon emissions, conserving the natural environment and supporting sustainable agriculture.

The Green New Deal focuses on the actions the Northern Ireland Executive can take to mitigate against the effects of the climate crisis. You can read our proposals here https://www.allianceparty.org/alliance_green_new_deal.



NATURE, WILDLIFE & BIODIVERSITY

We face a climate and ecological crisis, and Northern Ireland's unique natural environment is under threat.

Alliance believes we need ambitious, long term plans and concrete actions to restore our damaged ecosystems.

We will promote the protection of wildlife and the promotion of biodiversity by:

- Ensuring our environmental regulations meet the highest international standards – equal to or better than EU directives.
- Delivering an ambitious afforestation programme of native woodland species to increase Northern Ireland tree cover and achieve the current target of 19% cover by 2050 (approx. 2,000 hectares of trees a year) by a mixture of traditional forestry, agroforestry, orchards and amenity planting.
- Establishing an effective future land management scheme to provide landowners with resources and tools to improve the natural environment.
- Setting new ambitious, legally binding targets to protect our natural environment and drive the restoration of species and habitats.
- Establishing alignment with international efforts and environmental cooperation, particularly on actions to tackle illegal and unsustainable trade in timber, wildlife, ivory, and fish.
- Meeting the legislative requirement to make Northern Ireland supply chains deforestation-free by 2023.
- Delivering a Peatland Restoration Programme to support the climate mitigation plans through peatland and carbon stores conservation, restoration and improved management.
- Promoting biodiversity initiatives within education, and ensure that schools, colleges, and universities across the country play an active role in providing areas to promote biodiversity, including funding biodiversity degrees.
- Encouraging a greater connection to nature through community engagement, including greater participation and encouragement of eco-schools and nature-focused community events.
- Creating training opportunities and jobs for qualified vocational forest schools programmes and create additional woodland areas in our educational infrastructure so that all children have the opportunity to learn through an outdoor resource.
- Introducing a native Bee Strategy to address the drop-off in the number of bees, the consequence of which will be profound for the ecosystem.

NATIONAL PARKS

We will introduce a National Parks Bill to provide for the creation and designation of National Park status in Northern Ireland.

We are the only major part of Western Europe without a National Park. We will work toward the designation of at least one National Park in Northern Ireland.

It is estimated that designation of a Mourne National Park could result in an additional £81 million per annum in tourism revenue and result in over 2,000 jobs in the park and its hinterland. Recent wildfires in the Mournes have resulted in devastation to wildlife, biodiversity and nature in the area. By designating the High Mournes as a national park, the impact on the environment and the economy could be significant.

WASTE

In the UK, a quarter of the food we purchase is wasted every year, producing the equivalent of over 20 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and costing over £20 billion.

Addressing excess waste and reforming how we dispose of it will save money, reduce pollution and result in using less energy and therefore generating less carbon emissions.

To reduce the amount of waste we accumulate Alliance will:

- Extend separate food waste collections to 100% of homes by 2025.
- Consult on the introduction of an incineration levy.
- Introduce a Circular Economy Action Plan between the eleven councils in Northern Ireland, and ensure the Executive works collaboratively with local government on waste management issues.
- Make producers responsible for the waste they create and the total cost of recycling or disposal, encouraging more sustainable design and manufacturing.
- Reduce the number of waste management authorities to improve efficiency and consistency across the sector.
- Prioritise a plan to eliminate plastic pollution, including banning single-use plastic carrier bags by 2025.

AGRICULTURE

Alliance supports sustainable farming producing high-quality food. Agriculture is a major driver in the rural economy and farmers need support to meet the challenges of change. Farmers also play an essential role as guardians of the countryside: driving nature's recovery and protecting our wildlife and diversity.

With around 25,000 farms in Northern Ireland, most of which are small and family-run, we want to work alongside farmers to build a sustainable farming system producing high-quality food and tackle both the climate and wildlife crises.

Farming

By introducing carbon audits of farms, Alliance will support our farmers to embrace environmentally beneficial farming practices, reduce their carbon footprint, and better use and protect natural resources and biodiversity.

Audits will assess where performance improvements and savings can be made, as farms with a low carbon footprint are often the most efficient and profitable. Audits will occur every five years and be conducted by consultants approved by NIEA or an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

They will identify the best techniques to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and prove how much carbon is being stored in farmland, taking account of the mix of enterprises on each farm. Audits would be required for future eligibility for government funding. Financial support will also be dependent on emissions reduction and increased carbon sequestration.

In addition to implementing audits, Alliance will:

- Introduce an Agriculture Act for Northern Ireland to include bespoke policies relevant to the sector.
- Enable the sector to tackle ammonia emissions by bringing forward a scheme to ensure anaerobic digesters are utilised and do not encourage food waste. The scheme will promote the purchase of anaerobic digesters and provide funding for Vapogant digestate evaporators to help reduce ammonia emissions.
- Continue support for research on ruminant diets to reduce methane emissions.
- Encourage the use of renewable energies such as battery-powered electric or hydrogen tractors and other farm vehicles charged by locally generated wind or solar.
- Facilitate combined application of both organic amendments and the reduction of chemical fertiliser, to be applied only where required as a sustainable tool for soil restoration.
- Tackle bovine TB by better utilising the test, vaccinate and remove policy, with a view to eliminating the need for culling, which is ineffective and cruel.
- Targeting 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.
- Develop opportunities for people wishing to develop higher-level agricultural skills.
- Address the shortage in the labour market by seeking a regional migration opt-out.
- Ensure the DEFRA milk price purchasing code also applies to the local dairy industry.

Nature-Friendly farming will also be encouraged through:

- Expanding the Environmental Farming Scheme to promote habitat restoration, including linking areas of high value by wildlife corridors.
- Supporting land managers to transition to alternative land uses, including help with skills, training, information and support with up-front costs and long-term payback of investing in alternative uses.
- Promoting biodiversity gains by assisting the planting of trees, hedges, and other flora, the protection of existing trees and hedgerows, and the restoration and preservation of peat bogs.
- Reviewing assistance for farms to diversify through new programmes such as agri-tourism.
- Promoting local, sustainable produce through investing in food markets and farm shops, putting local food producers at the heart of our communities.

Fisheries

Our local fish processing sector may be small compared to other parts of the UK but makes a significant contribution to the areas in which it is based, and not just in economic terms. The sea surrounding this island supports daily lives, and provides multiple resources and services including food, renewable energy, tourism and leisure opportunities, physical and mental health benefits, and cultural heritage.

Alliance will:

- Introduce a Fisheries Bill for Northern Ireland which creates bespoke policies enshrined with sustainability that are unique to the local industry.
- Support the industry transition into a sustainable focused system and rebuild healthy fish stocks.
- Nurture inland fishing opportunities. Northern Ireland has excellent angling facilities that need to be better promoted as part of our tourist product.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Alliance has always prioritised animal welfare and sought to tackle cruelty against animals. People engaged in animal cruelty are not only a danger to the animals involved, but potentially to our society as a whole.

Alliance introduced legislation in the Assembly to ban hunting wild animals with dogs. Unfortunately, other parties did not share our desire to stop this awful practice and blocked the bill; we will reintroduce it in the next mandate to continue to clamp down on this barbaric practice.

Our priorities for animal welfare include:

- Introducing a ban on puppy farming and strengthening regulation of the legal puppy trade, including tightening the rules on legal breeding with greater enforcement.
- Increasing powers for local authorities to deal with issues around horse abandonment such as fly-grazing including the transfer of animal welfare issues, allowing the seizure of animals.
- Using the UK's global influence to end 'trophy hunting' and the trade of illegal animal products.
- Outlawing the use of snares.
- Working to reduce and better regulate necessary animal testing and invest in developing alternative scientific methods and practices.
- Micro-chipping and registration of kittens on the same basis as for puppies.
- 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.

SOCIAL SECURITY	72
EMPLOYMENT	72
HOUSING	73
REGENERATION & SHARED SPACE	75
THE ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE	75
SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	77
VOLUNTARY ACTION & ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP	77
LOCAL GOVERNMENT	78
RURAL COMMUNITIES	78



CHAPTER 10 **COMMUNITIES, ARTS & SPORT**

COMMUNITIES, ARTS & SPORT

Alliance wants to work within communities to promote opportunity and tackle poverty. Radical transformation is needed to ensure our communities are thriving.

Through participation in arts, sports and connection through our communities, people's wellbeing and overall life and health

enjoyment are higher. We will promote and deliver a high quality of life in Northern Ireland's communities, one which places a greater emphasis on the enrichment of arts, sports and leisure as means to both support the most vulnerable and enhance opportunities for everyone.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Alliance opposed Welfare Reform at Westminster and has been working hard to protect people throughout Northern Ireland with mitigations. However, we need to go further.

We will:

- Ensure that transitional protections are put in place to protect claimants being moved to Universal Credit.
- Examine the potential for a child payment and a carers payment, as provided in Scotland.
- Alliance will review the recommendations from the Independent Review of Mitigations to consider what opportunities or changes may be required to best suit the needs of people in Northern Ireland.
- Continue to push the Department of Work and Pensions to provide a fair rise in the rate of inflation for benefits.
- Work to ensure the growing number of pension age persons are able to access pension advice and support.
- Seek to remove welfare advice duplication by contracting with the community and voluntary sector, who deliver an effective service within communities.
- Explore the potential for a Universal Basic Income trial in Northern Ireland.

EMPLOYMENT

We believe those out of work should be supported back into employment and far more can be done to help people to remain in work.

To do this, Alliance will:

- Focus on the particular unemployment issues facing young people, including creating a revised Youth Employment Scheme from the current JobStart programme.
- Provide tailored interventions to assist the long-term unemployed to get back into work.
- Put pressure on the UK government to ensure the Shared Prosperity Fund is used for a Northern Ireland specific employment and skills programme that meets the needs of our people.
- Deliver the Disability Employment Strategy and invest in support services to help those with disabilities, such as learning difficulties or autism, gain training and employment opportunities.
- Ensure social clauses within government contracts are effective and used more extensively.
- Introduce disability and diversity training for social security office staff and employment support officers.
- Continue to raise the importance of childcare as a vital part of our economic infrastructure, which allows parents to work.

HOUSING

Sustainable Housing

Without safe and high quality housing, people experience a detrimental impact on their health, life opportunities and security. Alliance is committed to ensuring everyone living in Northern Ireland has access to a suitable home.

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

- Prioritise the retrofitting of housing for renewable energy sources and insulation.
- Legislate so the construction sector builds long-life, green projects.
- Build on the success of these energy efficiency measures by ensuring an effective fuel poverty strategy and improved efficiency targets for new builds. This will include a comprehensive approach to fuel poverty which includes insulation, efficient heating systems, fuel-switching, benefits assessments and promoting better value forms of fuel.
- Strengthen the connectivity of homes in urban and rural areas with significant sewerage infrastructure investment, energy investment, public transport and active travel infrastructure and ensuring access to broadband for homes regardless of location.
- Urge the UK Government to abolish VAT on all renovations and repairs to existing buildings so that houses can be repaired and refurbished at the same cost as building new homes.

Social and Affordable Housing

Social and affordable housing has always been an essential part of our housing infrastructure; delivery of social housing is a key public service.

As well as enabling the building of more homes, we will further improve the provision of social and affordable housing by:

- Ensuring any reforms to social housing provision do not jeopardise fairness, quality or diminish equality of access.
- Placing an emphasis on shared, mixed tenure developments, to build sustainable and inclusive communities.
- Addressing the Housing Executive's maintenance backlog and introducing a maximum waiting time for maintenance repairs.
- Reviewing existing housing stock to ensure homes meet standards on damp and insulation.
- Continuing to provide revenue funding to support sheltered and supported accommodation.
- Providing housing associations with the flexibility needed to provide community infrastructure in larger social housing developments, ensuring that social housing is safe, connected and vibrant.
- Developing a positive public understanding of the role of social housing.
- Introducing a regulatory mechanism for letting agencies and rent control schemes to ensure people are not priced out of the private rented sector.
- Supporting independent housing advice services.
- Legislating on the management on apartment developments to address gaps around properties which partly comprise of multi-unit developments, as well as the management of any designated common areas.
- Ensuring co-ownership limits reflect market value to ensure it is targeted in its intended purpose and does not disadvantage first time buyers as the housing market changes.

Preventing Homelessness

At the end of March 2021 there were 44,000 households waiting for a home, with almost 14,000 children growing up officially homeless. Any future reformed Housing Executive must ensure those figures are reduced.

Alliance believes it is critical that the following safety nets are put in place to help homeowners and tenants locally.

A number of measures are necessary. These include:

- Ensuring implementation of the proposed Homelessness Strategy for 2022-27.
- Seeking to support householders when their homes are at risk of repossession to stay in their homes, by examining the feasibility of a Preventing Possession Fund similar to those in operation in Scotland and England.
- Providing access to independent advice for people in mortgage or rent arrears, including emergency help at court proceedings.
- Requiring fee-charging debt management companies to demonstrate quality assurance by subscribing to their industry's codes of practice.
- Strengthening the pre action protocol for mortgage arrears proceedings to ensure all reasonable options to avoid possession are considered thoroughly.
- Introducing similar pre action protocols for social housing rent arrears possession proceedings to ensure eviction is always a last resort.
- Raising awareness of the role of discretionary housing payments for people at risk of eviction because of housing benefit cut.
- Adopting a positive approach to the assessment of homeless applications from people at risk of repossession as a consequence of debt.
- Making affordable credit facilities more accessible, for example by encouraging new initiatives involving social housing providers and credit unions.

Caravans

A full review and update of Caravans Legislation previously passed in 2011 is required to ensure it is fit for purpose and protects the rights of people residing in caravans.

This should include bringing forward new, updated legislation in the form of a Mobile Homes Act, as seen in England, Scotland and Wales, which is needed in Northern Ireland.

This legislation will provide local authorities with greater powers to enforce site license conditions against park owners, providing owner-occupiers of residential mobile (park) homes with greater protections against park owners.



REGENERATION & SHARED SPACE

All public space in Northern Ireland should be open and shared; however, evidence shows that fear affects our basic choices such as where people live, what they wear and where they access basic public services. It is essential that we actively seek to create and foster shared neighbourhoods, workplaces and public amenities.

The Executive must work towards safe and open access to all public space in Northern Ireland. It is important to recognise that shared space does not mean neutral space, rather a place where everyone can celebrate their identities in a vibrant, inclusive way.

In order to achieve this, Alliance will:

- Ensure that decisions on future public investment take account of whether assets can be shared and open to everyone.
- Require that planning policies and community planning make specific proposals to increase shared space.
- Embed good relations as a specific aim of regeneration and community planning.
- Seek to remove all interface barriers over time, in collaboration and partnership with local communities.
- Adopt a strong stance against the use of symbols, emblems and other displays which mark territory.

THE ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE

A vast body of evidence shows investment in arts and leisure has significant benefits for individual well-being and for our economy: that's why Alliance believes that we need to support and develop the talent Northern Ireland has to offer.

The creative sector can play a huge role in bringing people together and it is vital that the government supports the sector more than it has done in the past.

Alliance supports investment in the arts at all levels, so that our creative industries thrive and are accessible for everyone. As well as increasing per capita arts spending to at least the average spend on these islands, we will commission an Arts Funding Review to consider:

- Post-pandemic relief and regeneration programme funding arrangements.
- The effects of historic underfunding of the arts in Northern Ireland.
- Measures to improve funding stability and sustainability, including three-year budgeting and endowments.
- Capacity-building within arts and cultural organisations in key areas such as financial management, fundraising, marketing and audience development.

The creative sector has bounced back in Northern Ireland and the Executive should channel these opportunities. In addition to the funding review and implementation of outstanding NDNA commitments Alliance will:

- Develop a ten year Arts Strategy.
- Adopt a specific strategy to improve access to the arts by sections of the community who have lower-than-average uptake rates.
- Develop a formal protocol to ensure that sectarianism, racism or any other form of prejudice does not occur at artistic and cultural events funded by public money.
- Establish an integrated strategy for cultural tourism. This strategy must fully appreciate the unique cultural heritage we have to offer, and how these can be developed, managed and projected to a wider audience.

- Ensure that Northern Ireland’s art and culture is promoted globally, following the example of the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, who have successfully used increased global visibility of their arts and cultural output as part of a wider package to raise their international profile.
- Harness a greater emphasis on skills within the sector, upskilling the workforce and maximising awareness of opportunities within the creative industries sector.
- Invest in government funded creative space with strong a ethos of co-management and co-delivery by the sector.
- Invest in business models that address the long-term sustainability of creative spaces.
- Utilise the talent of the arts sector to allow external bodies to work in partnership with the formal education sector to improve accessibility for young people from a disadvantaged socio-economic background.
- Provide a support stream in partnership with local councils to promote the local music industry through a partnership with the Northern Ireland Music Prize.
- Invest in the Historic Environment Division to ensure it has the capacity and the ability to take legal action to prevent historic buildings and sites from falling into disrepair.

Languages

Alliance recognises the need for legislation to protect and promote indigenous languages in Northern Ireland. The commitment to introduce a Languages Act in the New Decade New Approach agreement has seen unnecessary delay and it should be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

We also recognise that some forms of support can be funded without legislation and can be included in the implementation of the Irish Language Strategy and Ulster Scots Strategy.

Alliance recognises the importance of the Irish language as part of our shared culture and heritage, that it is spoken and respected throughout our community, and that its status should be legally protected through an Irish Language Act. We also acknowledge the rich cultural heritage of the Irish language, and the need to promote its appreciation and celebration more widely.

As well as these proposals for the Irish language, we support the development of a comprehensive languages strategy, to include indigenous languages and other spoken languages used within Northern Ireland, as well as sign languages. Elements of this strategy would include:

- Legislating to create a duty on public bodies to develop language schemes that meet the identified needs of their user base.
- Supporting the development of Ulster-Scots Heritage through the Commissioner for Ulster Scots/Ulster British tradition.
- Recognising and supporting the development of British and Irish Sign Languages, including offering a GCSE in sign language.

SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Sport and physical activity are a part of our cultural life in Northern Ireland and play a vital role in promoting health and wellbeing, and in boosting the economy.

We believe it is essential that government invests in sport and physical activity and that people of all ages can be and stay active.

We also want to use the opportunities sport can provide to build good relations and social cohesion.

Alliance will:

- Deliver outstanding regional and sub-regional football stadia funding.
- Introduce social prescribing and create well-being centres at the heart of communities that have access to sports and leisure.
- Promote healthy living and physical activity across a range of public services including through PE lessons in school, a comprehensive approach to walking and cycling infrastructure, and working with local councils to upgrade leisure facilities.
- Enhance access to the guideline amount of physical education hours a week for pupils.
- Ensure sports and leisure facilities are accessible to all, with suitable activities for people with different needs.
- Facilitate the further creation and participation of events such as the weekly Park Run.
- Invest in the use and cleanliness of our open waters for sports use.
- Promote grassroots sports by investing in facilities.
- Increase uptake of physical activity amongst those sections of the community that have lower participation rates, such as women, people with disabilities, and people from areas of social disadvantage.
- Continue to support community relations programmes which reduce the tendency for some sports, or structures within sports, to be dominated by one part of our community, or that aim to reduce sectarianism, racism, homophobia or other hatred within sports.

- Strengthen the responsibilities of Sport NI in relation to using sports development to build a shared future. This would include: funding invested in sporting bodies being conditional upon demonstrable implementation of good relations plans with measurable outcomes; convening the major sporting bodies in Northern Ireland to consider further steps which can be taken to create a welcoming environment for all; and providing sporting organisations with guidelines on dealing with issues related to division within sport.
- Work with Sport NI to enhance their work with non-aligned sports as well as the existing governing bodies.

VOLUNTARY ACTION & ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The voluntary and community sector is a vital part of Northern Ireland's communities. It is also becoming an increasingly complex sector, which is involved in delivering public services as well as other philanthropic roles.

We need to ensure our government structures are in place to support the voluntary sector and promote an active role in communities for those who want it.

Alliance will do that by:

- Producing a public consultation on Active Citizenship and Volunteering to help make the most of these activities.
- Providing clearer advice on procurement for voluntary and community organisations.
- Create a carers' register to ensure there is data and awareness campaigns to highlight the support available to carers.
- Reviewing the Concordat Agreement with the Community and Voluntary Sector to ensure all government departments comply with appropriate partnership working with the sector.
- Ensuring that full cost recovery is honoured in grants and contracts.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Alliance was a strong proponent of local government reform and will further enhance the powers and ability of local councils to transform communities by:

- Devolving regeneration powers to councils as soon as possible.
- Auditing the effectiveness of councils' plans for community relations to ensure this vital area is properly supported.

Local Alliance councillors will pursue our aims in their councils, but an overview of our proposals can be found in our 2019 local government manifesto, available at https://www.allianceparty.org/2019_local_government_manifesto.

Accountability, openness and transparency are essential in decision making and governance of local government.

Alliance will introduce:

- A review of the Local Government Ombudsman, to include effectiveness and purpose of the role.
- An oversight mechanism to hold to account the management structure of local government, within the Department of Communities.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Alliance has long championed equal opportunities for rural communities. We envision a future for Northern Ireland with sustainable rural communities at its heart, where even the most remote areas thrive and are valued.

Alliance is committed to:

- Ensuring that policy development by central and local government includes both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis, to identify and mitigate all potential adverse impacts of proposed policies on rural communities.
- The universal provision of digital infrastructure; improvements to rural road infrastructure; innovative demand-led public transport in rural areas; investment in grid capacity and preparing for a net-zero future.
- The delivery of superfast broadband and mobile phone signal to all rural communities, with speeds and costs equitable to those in urban areas.
- Fair funding for the delivery of public services and rural development.
- Rural communities having greater influence on the decisions which affect them in relation to energy production and supply.
- Delivering policies to rebalance the impacts of tourism in rural areas and strategic investment promoting alternative destinations.
- Championing the participation and recognition of rural women across all of government.
- Tackling rural crime – such as vandalism, anti-social behaviour, wildlife crime and livestock theft. We will call for accountable rural policing that is sensitive to local priorities and issues.

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE	80
WATER AND SEWERAGE	80
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT	81
ROADS FOR THE FUTURE	82
ACTIVE TRAVEL	82
IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY	83
ROAD SAFETY	83
PLANNING	84

A large field of solar panels is shown, with the panels arranged in rows and supported by metal poles. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds, and the foreground is a lush green field with some yellow flowers.

CHAPTER 11 **INFRASTRUCTURE**

INFRASTRUCTURE

We need a radical improvement in infrastructure to prepare Northern Ireland for the future.

Alliance wants to modernise our infrastructure, targeting spending to maximise social and economic benefits and taking a responsible, long-term approach to planning.

Alliance is fully committed to taking those responsible decisions, alongside ensuring we meet domestic and international targets to tackle the climate crisis.

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

We will overhaul how decisions relating to infrastructure are made. This new approach will consist of:

- Creating a new Independent Infrastructure Commission with a thirty-year vision to prioritise, report on and drive delivery of infrastructure projects, assuming the responsibilities of the existing Strategic Investment Board to assist departments in delivering projects. This will sit alongside the ten year Investment Strategy, linked to multi-year Budgetary process, focusing upon sustainable green growth with balanced regional development reflecting historic underinvestment West of the Bann.
- Continuing to maximise EU funding to build infrastructure that unites communities, while pressing the UK government to end the power grab on replacement EU funding.
- Resourcing and equipping the Department for Infrastructure's Rivers and Flood management agencies to tackle the realities of climate change and coastal erosion.
- Ensuring that the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office reports into major capital projects, and the capacity and capability of the Civil Service as relevant to infrastructure are responded to in full.

WATER & SEWERAGE

Our water and wastewater infrastructure are vital to maintaining public health, enabling development and growth, and protecting our environment.

The current subsidy paid to Northern Ireland Water is over £300 million every year, yet our wastewater infrastructure is outdated and at maximum capacity.

Whilst Alliance opposes any privatisation of NI Water, its funding model is unsustainable and needs to change.

Alliance believes we can achieve this by:

- Mutualising NI Water to allow it to borrow to invest in our water and wastewater infrastructure. The Fiscal Council should recommend a sustainable way forward which will safeguard our water and sanitation services without burdening domestic customers with extra charges.
- Fully funding Price Control 21 and the Living With Water programme to unlock the growing barrier to new house building, job creation and economic creation in many towns and cities.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

Chronic underinvestment in public transport has created a highly car-dependent society in Northern Ireland.

Significant infrastructure investment is vital for a clean, sustainable transport system that works for everyone. As well as drastically reducing emissions, investment will create meaningful modal change, support equal opportunities, reduce social exclusion and break down the socioeconomic transport divide.

We need clean, accessible transport that works for our communities, our environment and our economy.

Alliance will introduce:

- The creation of an independent Sustainable Travel Commissioner for Northern Ireland, underpinned by obligations set out in a Sustainable Travel Bill, to increase uptake and address barriers towards accessing public transport, active travel and zero-emissions vehicles.
- Local Development Plans that include a presumption in favour of sustainable transport, integrated transport systems (including Park and Rides) and active travel.
- Full and meaningful engagement with community transport providers to better enable operations, via improved financial support from the Department for Infrastructure.
- North-South and East-West cooperation and collaboration on important infrastructure projects, creating sustainable transport links and jobs for the future, including the Ulster Canal, the Narrow Water Bridge, cross-border Greenways, and road safety upgrades of the A75 and A77 in Scotland.
- A review of concessionary fares to include consideration of providing full concessionary fares to those with a disability currently eligible for Half Fare SmartPass, and increasing the age to which half-fares are available for children and young people from 16 to 22 as part of wider public transport recovery and growth plans.
- Financial support for Translink to allow the realisation of their commitment to become net-zero by 2040 and climate positive by 2050; to enable them to respond to the new travel patterns that have been accelerated through the pandemic; and to allow investment in modern contactless and flexible ticketing arrangements.
- The development of a modern, all-Ireland rail network through a new 5-year plan for rail investment, working with the Irish Government on the Strategic Rail Review, and increasing the frequency and speed of the Derry-Londonderry-Belfast-Dublin-Cork rail service to high-speed rail with connectivity to Limerick and other key cities.
- A revised and renewed Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy, aligned to Translink plans for net-zero by 2040 and climate positive by 2050 with service improvements, network investment and consideration given to re-opening of the Knockmore to Antrim line, re-instatement of the railway line between Portadown to Armagh, connecting Northern Ireland's three airports to the rail network and expansion into the west following decades of underinvestment west of the Bann.
- A pilot initiative to encourage greater uptake of bus and rail travel with migration from the private car through the targeted provision of one week's free bus and rail travel with evidence of pilot to inform any wider roll-out.

ROADS FOR THE FUTURE

Just 0.3% of Northern Ireland's licensed vehicles are ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs). Alliance want to facilitate the transition towards lower emissions by:

- Reviewing all new road building schemes, ensuring they align with overall net zero ambitions, focusing on enhancing road safety, facilitating active travel and improving air quality.
- Prioritising the development of an Electric Vehicle (EV) strategy for Northern Ireland with the view to rapidly accelerating the number of EV charge points operational on key transport corridors, in car parks, and in residential areas.
- Following Scotland's lead in providing interest-free loans towards the cost of an electric vehicle, which could be used on top of the Office for Low Emissions Vehicles plug-in grant scheme.
- Updating Building Control and Planning regulations to ensure all new homes provide EV Charging as a default.
- Making it easier to connect EV charging points to the electricity network, alongside interventions to encourage a competitive public EV charging marketplace.
- Requiring all government departments and public sector bodies to purchase zero-emission vehicles, where such sustainable alternatives exist.
- Replicating the Nottingham Workplace Parking Levy, which places an annual charge of £415 on all employers who provide eleven or more workplace parking spaces to invest in public transport.
- Supporting a York Street Interchange upgrade that prioritises active travel, community engagements, and linkages between North and West Belfast and the city centre.
- Working with the taxi industry to encourage new drivers into the industry and electrifying the fleet as part of a sustainable transport solution.

- Implementing the recommendations of the Barton Review and the NI Audit Office report on structural maintenance, specifically by preparing a multi-year funding model for roads maintenance which will be more efficient and ultimately save money for the department.
- Continuing to work to reduce the backlog of unadopted roads, and ensure that processes are in place to ensure that developers pre-fund their commitments to bring developments up to the required standard.
- Take legislative action to tackle pavement parking and any other obstructive parking.

ACTIVE TRAVEL

Alliance is a vocal advocate of cycling and walking. Being able to take journeys by foot or bike should be the norm in an active and climate aware society. The main barrier to this is safety and, therefore, the need to rebalance the amount of dedicated cycling provision.

In order to facilitate this, we will:

- Significantly increase spend per capita on active travel.
- Deliver the Bicycle Strategy and the Greenway Strategy.
- Prioritise cycling infrastructure such as cycle lanes, Greenways and storage, in part by incentivising local councils to bring forward schemes.
- Further encourage cycling by investigating bike-repair incentive schemes, an expansion of the successful Belfast Bike scheme, and the introduction of a pilot e-bike hire scheme.
- Significantly increase the number of school children participating in the Active Schools Travel Programme and Cycling Proficiency Scheme.

IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY

Alliance believes that we need to improve connectivity for Northern Ireland to GB and beyond in a sustainable way, including by both air and sea. We have seen during the pandemic and since, the vulnerability of our air and sea connections to market forces and global pressures, with potentially serious consequences to supply chains, businesses and families.

Whilst most of the controls lie within the reserved space, it is important that securing and developing routes, including landing slots at GB hub airports, is recognised as vital to our economic success as an island region, and is supported by both Assembly and Westminster policy.

We want to see reform of Air Passenger Duty, so those who fly the most pay more, shifting the burden onto those with the largest carbon footprint without removing access to flights for those with limited alternatives or resources.

We also want to see more innovation in the aviation industry, to facilitate essential air travel which is lower emission and has less environmental impact, including noise.

We recognise the importance of sea connectivity, particularly for freight. We want to explore how ferry travel can become cleaner and routes remain viable in the long term, placing it on a more sustainable footing for the future.

ROAD SAFETY

Alliance is deeply concerned about the number of deaths on our roads and believes that improvements in transport infrastructure must be accompanied by improvements to road safety.

We will:

- Publish a new, more ambitious Road Safety Strategy that protects all road users, including pedestrians.
- Give local councils the power to lower speed limits in their areas, and support the trial of wider 20mph zones as has been seen in Wales.
- Invest in road improvements which facilitate safe active travel, such as footpath extensions and repairs. and lighting.

PLANNING

The devolution of planning powers to local councils has overhauled the way that planning powers are exercised. We supported these reforms as they will ensure that decisions are locally accountable. However, planning decisions must also be transparent.

Alliance will continue to push for these decisions to be made in an open manner – with councillors making their decisions based on evidence not politics.

We want to further reform the planning system by:

- Introducing a qualified third-party right of appeal in planning decisions, so that local communities will have a right to object to planning decisions, alongside altering the approach to retrospective planning applications with increased fees and fines and enforcement activity, which should not be a discretionary function.
- Reviewing how we can incentivise the greening of our towns and cities, as well as disincentivise structures such as car parks which perpetuate private vehicle travel.
- Exploring further permitted development rights for green energy infrastructure, following the outcome of the review of renewable energy planning, in consultation with the industry.
- Trial introduction of processing agreements and statutory timeframes for determining applications, focused initially on applications which have a positive impact upon tackling the climate crisis, most specifically renewable energy applications.
- Putting pre-application discussions and checklists for all major applications onto a statutory footing, providing councils with the powers to reject poor quality and incomplete applications or the submission of late information.
- Speed up Local Development Plan process by simplifying and streamlining the current elongated nature of LDPs, alongside consultation on enabling Regionally Significant Applications to be passed to the PAC or an Independent Planning Inspectorate for determination.
- Allowing local councils to introduce caps on Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in tightly-defined areas.



CHAPTER 12
BREXIT & THE PROTOCOL



BREXIT & THE PROTOCOL

Alliance remains a strongly pro-European party. The biggest challenges we face are global and we believe that our influence is greater if exercised in cooperation with our nearest neighbours. The Good Friday Agreement was powered by both UK and Ireland being full members of the European Union (EU).

There is no such thing as a good or sensible Brexit, either for the UK as a whole or Northern Ireland in particular. That is why Alliance opposed Brexit. We therefore want to re-join the EU at the earliest opportunity. In the interim, we want to foster a close and constructive relationship with the EU.

The Protocol is not perfect: indeed, Alliance opposed the Protocol in both the European Parliament and Westminster. However, it is the inevitable consequence of the UK Government's and DUP's pursuit of a hard Brexit, despite the challenges it posed for Northern Ireland. It is an attempt to smooth some of the inevitable friction caused by the UK leaving the Single Market and Customs Union. Even with the Protocol, Northern Ireland loses significantly from being removed from the Single Market for services and the free movement of EEA citizens. That is a result of Brexit itself, rather than the Protocol.

So, while the Protocol is imperfect, in the absence of any viable alternative, the only course of action is to try and make it work. It also provides us with the legal basis on which to develop further bilateral agreements, not only in areas of trade but also areas such as justice cooperation. We are, therefore, Protocol pragmatists.

We are committed to doing all we can to reduce the level and impact of the resultant checks affecting Irish Sea crossings via our ports and airports through seeking closer alignment between the UK as a whole and the EU, and also achieving further mitigations, flexibilities and derogations via negotiated UK-EU changes to the Protocol.

Unilateral changes and temporary measures fail to provide the stability and legal certainty that business requires; undermine the trust and confidence necessary for smooth trade movements; and risk creating gaps that are ripe for exploitation by organised crime gangs.

In parallel, while we recognise that all forms of Brexit bring problems and losses to Northern Ireland, we are conscious that our region has greater economic opportunities than other parts of the UK due to our ongoing de facto participation in the EU Single Market for goods, and our unique ability to have unfettered access to both the Great Britain and European markets. This relative opportunity must be fully exploited.

OUR RECORD ON PROTOCOL FLEXIBILITIES

When the Withdrawal Agreement was initially agreed, Alliance called for a longer transition period before the Protocol came into effect.

We were the first political party to call for grace periods on Protocol implementation to give businesses time to prepare, for supply chains to readjust, and crucially for mitigations and derogations to be agreed.

We pushed for Northern Ireland's political representation on UK-EU decision-making bodies, and tabled amendments in Parliament. We welcomed commitments made in New Decade New Approach.

We have lobbied for guarantees on the unfettered access for Northern Ireland goods to Great Britain, and for the removal of the need for exit summary declarations.

We championed flexibilities on the regulation and supply of medicines into Northern Ireland and pushed for the 12-month derogation. We welcome the creative solutions that have now been provided by the European Commission.

Alliance has led the campaign for the creation of a UK-EU Veterinary Agreement as the best way to minimise the nature and level of Sanitary and Phytosanitary checks across the Irish Sea.

WAY FORWARD

Alliance wants to see pragmatic solutions in relation to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Protocol itself provides the basis for further agreements to be made between the UK and EU.

Supplementary agreements can also be reached by the UK and EU to build on the minimalist Trade and Cooperation Agreement. While on the surface the zero tariff, zero quota aspect of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement is helpful to Northern Ireland, it essentially prioritised UK sovereignty and regulatory autonomy, lacked an SPS agreement, and was weak on services, the mutual recognition of qualifications, and access to EU programmes. The nature and level of UK divergence from the EU determines the nature and level of checks that could be required across the Irish Sea.

We want to see a comprehensive set of agreements on a broad range of issues, including SPS checks, customs checks and governance and democratic accountability issues.

Outcomes should be jointly agreed, sustainable, and provide stability and certainty to businesses and other stakeholders. It is important that all businesses and organisations are clear that they are operating in a legal way. It is also crucial that Northern Ireland can provide a viable inward investment offer underpinned by respect for the rule of law.

The current arrangements that allow Northern Ireland unfettered access for goods to both Great Britain and the EU must be preserved. Indeed, we want to see them enhanced.

Medicines

Alliance welcomes the EU proposals in relation to medicine. We call for swift progress to put these into legal effect.

Alliance will continue to work with the EU and UK for similar arrangements to be put in place for veterinary medicine.

SPS Checks

Alliance advocates a comprehensive UK-EU Veterinary Agreement. This would be a bespoke deal to address the specific circumstances of the bilateral relationship, but should primarily reflect the current Switzerland model.

Short of a UK-wide arrangement, Alliance will support a specific arrangement for movements into Northern Ireland.

A time-limited SPS agreement, in which the UK Government gives a commitment not to diverge in relation to EU law, should also be considered to provide more time for other solutions to be agreed.

Any SPS arrangement for Northern Ireland must cover movement of chilled meats and include measures for the free movement of pets.

Customs

Alliance supports measures to simplify customs processes, including around custom codes and the requirements for supplementary declarations. We believe that a 'green channel' style system can be put in place to separate goods that are staying in Northern Ireland from those that may proceed into the EU Single Market.

We also want to see further simplification of the management of parcel movements.

Governance and Democratic Accountability

Under the Protocol Northern Ireland remains subject to the Single Market's rules in relation to the movement of goods and associated matters. Outside of the EU, Northern Ireland elected representatives have no direct input into the development of new EU law that would apply.

Alliance does not believe that current proposals from the EU to provide a super-consultation exercise directed to Northern Ireland on new legislation or improved Northern Ireland representation on the UK delegations within the different structures of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement go far enough.

Alliance advocates a structure to give Northern Ireland elected representatives a direct consultative input at the initiation stage of policy development.

Trade Issues

Alliance recognises that there are several trade issues affecting Northern Ireland that need to be clarified by the UK and EU via the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. These include:

- The application of duties on unprocessed goods moving from the EU via Great Britain to Northern Ireland.
- The scope of tariff rate quotas.
- Simplification of rules of origin requirements.
- Access for goods or components from Northern Ireland to EU free trade agreements.

Matters for UK Government

Alliance will work with the UK Government to improve areas where they have sole responsibility.

We call on the Government to put in place robust regulations to define 'Qualifying Goods' moving from Northern Ireland to Great Britain that achieve unfettered access. This is crucial to consolidating Northern Ireland as a location for investment.

We also call on the Government to advance the promised rebate scheme in relation to goods 'at risk'.

Alliance urges the Government to provide better communication and information to businesses in Great Britain regarding trade with Northern Ireland.

We advocate continued technological improvements and simplification of the platforms used and processes required from businesses. Alliance wants a long-term commitment to be made to the Trader Support Service, including extension of eligibility for businesses with sole establishment in Great Britain.

Alliance will continue to lobby for more progress to be made on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications between the UK and EU.

Alliance will continue to push for the conditions to be met for the UK to access EU Programmes, such as Horizon Europe.

Matters for Irish Government

Alliance will also work with the Irish Government in areas where they can act unilaterally.

We call for an audit of the mapping exercise to assess the impact of Brexit on north-south cooperation.

Alliance will lobby for an assessment to what extent the all-island services sector and mutual recognition of professional qualifications can continue to be supported by the Common Travel Area and the rights set out within the Good Friday Agreement and recognised in Article 2 of the Protocol.

Alliance will continue to lobby for the Irish Government to provide a route for all the people of Northern Ireland to access EU Programmes via Ireland, in line with commitments made by the last government and building on the precedent set in relation to EHIC cards and Erasmus+.

CHAPTER 13
GOVERNANCE & POLITICAL REFORM



GOVERNANCE & POLITICAL REFORM

Our political institutions need transformation. Alliance believes that the public deserves better than the status quo.

Northern Ireland has never consisted of only two communities. It's time we had a political system that reflects today's open, progressive and diverse society.

A system whereby the two largest parties can veto the creation of a cross-community government further reinforces the need for reform to permit a voluntary coalition to be established.

In the years since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland has not been able to reach its full potential as an economy and a society.

Opportunities have been missed and political division has led to poor outcomes on some issues, and complete deadlock on others. Our system of government has increasingly become marred by a lack of openness and accountability, and characterised by corruption and cronyism. Cheap populism and favouritism to preferred sections of society have led to an inefficient and unfair allocation of resources.

For too long, we have been held back by a dereliction of leadership and communication breakdown by the two largest parties in the Executive.

Every government needs to work on the basis of trust, respect and partnership. There also needs to be a shared understanding of the common good, a commitment to cohesion, and adherence to collective responsibility. It is disputable to what extent the necessary relationships between the parties in government over the past 18 years have ever been sufficient. However, they have deteriorated even further in recent years.

The nature and design of the institutions and the mechanisms of government currently magnify disagreement and disincentivise cooperation and progress.

Particular concerns include:

- Institutional sectarianism, in particular the designation and related voting system in the Assembly.
- The politics of 'them' versus 'us' over control of territory and resources rather than any consideration of a shared vision and common goals for Northern Ireland.
- The mutual vetoes granted to the largest parties in the Executive are undemocratic.
- Cooperation, moderation and accommodation have not been incentivised: instead entrenched intra-communal competition rewards hardline and exclusive politics.
- Departments tend to exist within silos, and there is insufficient joined-up government and collaboration in relation to cross-cutting issues.

Alliance is committed to stable and sustainable power-sharing that respects liberal, democratic principles and which reinforces the development of a normal, civic society and the creation of a shared future.

Alliance supports the Good Friday Agreement, and endorses its underlying principles, its structures, and its interlocking relationships. However, we have always supported reform of the structures of government and, in light of recent developments, the case for reform is stronger than ever.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Alliance has suggested a number of ways to secure a better functioning and more stable political system for Northern Ireland. We want to see reform that eliminates the politics of deadlock and stalemate, incentivises cooperation and embeds cross-departmental working.

Whilst there has been some reform to the Petition of Concern, Alliance believes that more fundamental change is required in order to allow us to have a truly cross-community government, a fair Assembly, and to ensure that stalemate doesn't cause the collapse of the institutions. We know the real cost of collapse: missed economic opportunities for Northern Ireland, a lack of decision-making in delivering public services and no progress on social issues that matter to our community.

We have repeatedly made the case to the UK Government that the following changes are critical:

- The current cross-community voting system in the Assembly should be replaced by a weighted majority system, free from designations. This change should also extend to the Executive, where cross-community votes are frequently used with even less transparency.
- The Executive should be formed by voluntary coalition, which is decided through negotiation between parties and which is subject to a vote in the Assembly. Collective responsibility should apply.
- Whilst the confidentiality of Executive meetings should be respected and preserved to allow for full and frank discussion, the agenda of each meeting should be published in order to flush out de facto vetoes of agenda items which are used behind closed doors.
- The First and deputy First Ministers should be renamed "Joint First Ministers". This would end what has become a contrived yet polarising contest over which party has a claim to the "higher" office, when in effect the posts are equal in standing in all respects. The Executive Office should remain a joint office in name and practice.
- Assembly arrangements should be strengthened in order to facilitate an effective opposition made up of parties who do not wish to enter the Executive.
- A statutory duty should be placed on Executive departments to ensure cross-departmental working at both ministerial and official level. This is critical for delivery on cross-cutting Programme for Government (PfG) objectives and beyond.
- The budget should be aligned with PfG objectives to further improve cross-departmental delivery.

OPENNESS & TRANSPARENCY

We believe the public need to have trust in their political representatives, that political parties need to work in the spirit of respect and cooperation, and that government must work in partnership with the public and the third sector.

Openness and transparency are integral to building and sustaining the relationships that make good governance possible.

Alliance will continue to demand:

- The implementation of commitments within the New Decade, New Approach agreement. The failure to implement political agreements undermines trust when future agreements are required, and NDNA commitments around governance will shore up the resilience of our political institutions.
- Full transparency of political donations. Changes brought by Alliance in November 2013 ensured that all political donations were recorded from January 2014 onwards. However, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland chose only to publish those from July 2017 onwards, so we still have a period of secrecy which needs to be addressed.
- The highest possible standards in public life; no party should be able to veto sanctions against themselves.
- Meaningful participation for the public: voting should be extended to over 16s for all elections and referendums, and we should explore the use of Citizens' Assemblies to engage the public in tackling societal issues, such as the climate crisis.
- A lobbying register in Northern Ireland.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Civic Forum for Northern Ireland was established as part of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and was suspended alongside the Assembly in 2002. Despite being an integral part of the institutions set out within the Good Friday Agreement, and subsequently endorsed by public referendum, it has not functioned since this date.

We believe that the previous model for the Civic Forum is not suitable for the current political climate and instead proposed a new model, based on the Scottish Futures Forum, which has a small executive but plans a wide-ranging workload and engages with civic society as appropriate.

We were pleased when Alliance proposals for this body were incorporated into recent political agreements and welcomed the appointment of its board. We will work with this body to set an ambitious terms of reference and to ensure it interacts well with public bodies.

Alliance has long supported a Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland in order to give young people a voice and to influence decisions that affect them and we welcome its recent establishment.

ALLIANCE PARTY ASSEMBLY MANIFESTO 2022



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