



Assembly Election 2003

Welcome...

...to the Conservative Party manifesto
for the Northern Ireland Assembly
Elections of 2003.



The Conservative Party is the only mainstream political party that contests elections throughout the entire United Kingdom.

The Assembly Election in Northern Ireland stands alongside the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and English Council elections that the Conservatives have contested in 2003.

We are a party of the Union.

Whilst both the Labour Party and the LibDems shamefully deny voters in Northern Ireland what we believe is their democratic right, the Conservative Party does not. We offer ourselves to the electorate as a positive alternative towards building a better society in Northern Ireland.

A vote for the Conservative Party is a vote for change, a vote for a better society, a vote for the future.

Conservatives believe that Northern Ireland benefits greatly from being a partner in the United Kingdom. We will work to strengthen that Union, strengthen the democratic process by promoting and arguing for the people of Northern Ireland to play a full part in that process, with the full engagement and involvement of national UK parties.

We seek a new type of politics in Northern Ireland. We do not believe the current sectarian nature of our politics, with parties operating only within six counties of the United Kingdom and founded on a single constitution issue have served us well in the past. With the advent of devolution and the necessity to make our own vital decisions on matters that affect our daily lives, we believe the time to move on from purely orange / green politics has arrived. Education and Health issues do not give a hoot for our traditional argument.

A vote for an alternative.

Governing ourselves

The majority of people in Northern Ireland believe in the concept of a devolved government.

However, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, long term acceptance of devolution is based upon it actually working for the benefit of the community. An expensive extra layer of government for the sake of it, or devolution resulting in the carrying on of a sectarian squabble in a new environment, simply cancels out any benefits the exercise might be expected to bring.

The Conservative Party will seek to make the devolved Assembly work for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. That means looking at how, as the Assembly matures, its workings can be reformed in the future to secure the trust of the Northern Irish people, strengthening the relationships between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom to ensure that the new constitutional framework is a true partnership with the national government and works no matter which parties are in power.

The Review

Cutting down to size

Government exists to serve the people, not the other way round. We believe a leaner, fitter government does a better job.

Northern Ireland currently has 108 MLAs whereas Scotland, with three times the population of Northern Ireland, has 129 MSPs. Pressure is mounting in Scotland for this number to be reduced. Wales, with twice our population, has 60 Assembly Members.

We believe 6 MLAs for each constituency, when one Westminster MP is enough for each, is excessive and promote the argument that this number should be reduced, perhaps to allow for 72 MLAs.

A fundamental part of the Agreement is the designation procedure in which elected representatives designate themselves 'Unionist', 'Nationalist' or 'Other'. We understand the argument in favour of this procedure but point out that, in our opinion, this measure simply institutionalises sectarianism and reinforces sectarian voting patterns. All at a time when we are trying to move away from our troubled history.

It is unfortunate that political parties need only play to their own constituency – 'the Protestant Community' or 'the Catholic Community'. We regret the impact of being divided into two camps and believe this is wrong. Far from healing community tensions, our official designations actually exacerbate them.

Any Conservative elected to the Assembly will refuse to play the sectarian headcount and will remain non-designated.

Casting a vote

Conservatives will work towards the day when such a system can be removed. We believe an interim step such as introducing a two-thirds majority in the Assembly to carry votes presently requiring a 'cross-community' vote is a target we should all aim for.

The Conservative Party is a party open to all regardless of religion, race, colour or creed. We believe the future of politics in Northern Ireland lies away from being defined by a stance on the Constitution with its religious foundation and in competing left / right ideologies instead.

Sharing power or dividing it up?

NI does not have 'cabinet government', meaning each department is entirely independent to adopt its own policies – even where these run counter to those adopted in other departments and indeed sometimes counter to the expressed will of the people.

This means the political leadership required to see NI through its difficulties cannot exist, because the First Minister cannot ensure coherent and consistent policies across all departments. The reality is that 'collective responsibility' within the NI Executive does not exist.

Collective responsibility will stabilise government. A minister's proposals should be those of the Executive. Proposals should then be put before the Assembly.

We believe this is inherently destabilising and that Cabinet Government offers a better solution. Following election of the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and other Ministers, the Executive should ideally put together a consistent Programme for Government and oblige other departments to follow that programme, as is the case just about anywhere else in the democratic world.

Our present arrangement has weaknesses such as the Education Minister proposing radical reforms without consultation nor agreement with the rest of the Executive.

Organisation

We believe the efficiency of NI government can be improved whilst costs are reduced.

The six departments under direct rule became eleven under devolution in order to facilitate an equal spread of power and ensure involvement. With each department requiring its own Permanent Secretary and senior staff, the net result is expensive government.

Government has become even less efficient, as with so few departments very often policy has to be developed across departments. For example, DSD looks after housing, DRD looks after infrastructure, DoE looks after environmental considerations, DARD looks after rural development – so if you're a planner, which one do you approach?

Government needs to be made less expensive and more accountable.

We propose the number of departments should be cut back and suggest six:

- Office of the Centre - currently OFMDFM
- Department of Commerce and Employment – currently DETI and DEL
- Department of Education and Culture – currently DED and DCAL
- Department of the Environment and Agriculture, currently DoE, DRD, DSD and DARD
- Department of Finance and Personnel – currently DFP
- Department of Health and Services - currently DHSSPS

This improves accountability and has the added benefit of the government reducing expenditure on itself.

Local Government

The drive for efficient government should be carried through to local government also.

Our 26 local councils have too little power. Frequently, debates in council chambers all too often degenerate into sectarian confrontations on issues over which they have no control or simply matters that are perceived as slights by one side over the other.

NI needs powerful local government taking real decisions, in order to be more accountable to local people and encourage genuine trust between the parties involved in it.

We propose eight unitary authorities, to replace the 26 administrative districts, five education boards and four health boards. Each may have rotating mayoralties to ensure parties worked together. They would also have at least equivalent powers to county councils in GB and the Republic.

We believe decisions on the Foyle Riverfront are best made by people from the area, not a Belfast-born, Belfast-bred and Belfast-based minister.

A stronger United Kingdom

Better relationships between the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster require effective liaison. The office of Secretary of State should be retained to fulfil this role and work with both the Executive and Parliament and its committees.

Equal Citizenship

The Conservative Party is the only mainstream party to organise throughout the United Kingdom. We are committed to the principle of the people of Northern Ireland having a full role to play in the United Kingdom political structure. We should all have the right to vote for or against any party that aspires to govern us and so we fully support the work being done to have the Labour Party organise in Northern Ireland. We encourage the LibDems to do the same.



Improving Society

Conservatives want to see an education system which caters for the needs of every child so that no child is left behind.



Educating our children

We should take pride in the level of our academic achievements in Northern Ireland. It is a passport for progress for individuals and for our community which desperately needs to continually increase economic competitiveness, skill levels and entrepreneur spirit in a competitive global marketplace.

We should take pride in the fact that some of the best performing schools in the UK are right here in Northern Ireland.;

However, we must not be complacent. Whilst we have some of the best academic results, we also have a tail of under performing pupils – albeit not at a rate experienced by the rest of the UK.

The desire of our previous Education Minister, supported by many MLAs, to end academic selection, leading to the end of grammar schools and comprehensive education is folly.

A one size fits all comprehensive system, which is supposed to be about equality, simply reinforces an enormous gulf between the best and the worst performing schools. The GB experience shows far too many children end up trapped in poor schools, overwhelmingly in the most deprived parts of our community, which denies them the educational opportunities to advance in life. Standards of discipline are falling and attacks on teachers are rising. Our education minister wished to go down this road and impose “equality” by destroying the best.

We believe in promoting excellence, not abolishing it.

We believe in providing opportunity for all, not restricting it.

Trying to make all schools the same doesn't work. Postcode then determines education, denying opportunity, perpetuating division. Private school attendance in inner London is twice the national average and rising. 30% of pupils in Edinburgh go to private schools. House prices attract a premium in "good school" catchment areas.

Conservatives believe investment should be supported with reform. We believe a key to real improvement is to give parents real choice in the education of their children and to give schools and head teachers the freedom to provide these choices and create schools that parents will want to send their children to.

Conservatives will vigorously oppose abolishing the ability of schools to select on the basis of individual aptitude.

The Conservative Party aims to give more discretion to headmasters on what to teach, simplifying the national curriculum and expecting them to make it clear to parents what they offer. The exam overload will be lightened by abolishing AS levels and re-examine the best examination system for all post-16 pupils. Schools will be allowed to take more control of their finances and management and will have greater discretion over how to spend their budget.

Northern Ireland's future prosperity relies on the skills and achievements of its young people. Money well spent here is a priority investment for the future. As such, Conservatives, whilst fully understanding the budget pressures, oppose handicapping students with financial burdens that deter them from further education.

Conservatives will

- **fight to maintain academic selection**
- **protect the grammar schools**
- **protect the best, improve the rest**

Helping the health service

Conservatives are committed to a health service which is universal in its reach and available to all; free at the point of use; is of high quality and delivered by professionals with the time, resources and skills to ensure the best standards of care.

In Northern Ireland we have some of the longest waiting times for treatment in Europe. Cancer survival rates fall below the best achieved in other countries. Our hospitals constantly grapple with the problems of delayed discharges. Bureaucracy is increasing.

Family doctors have suffered from inadequate investment for decades, often having to refer patients to expensive hospitals because the simple equipment they need is not available to them.



The solution is not just about money. We are led to believe more money is being spent but the gains are not commensurate with the investment. “Reform” has escalated since 1997 putting enormous pressure on staff. Professionals in the health service responsible for providing treatment and care face enormous pressure. Workload in patient care is intense; patient turnover very high; treatments more intensive. The added burden has been increasing paperwork measuring “targets”. This results in absences and high people leaving the profession.

Conservatives will

make primary care development a priority

institute the promotion of primary care trusts, giving a pivotal role to general practitioners who remain uniquely well placed to understand and know the needs of their patients. All care professional groups will be involved and over a 3-4 year timescale these trusts will be commissioning the majority of healthcare services for their patients

propose the current four health boards be replaced by a single regional commissioning service for the commissioning of province wide services e.g. cardiac surgery, neuro-surgery, renal, cancer, orthopaedic and paediatric

support the ending of politically inspired targets, putting patient needs first by giving doctors, nurses and managers the freedom to deliver treatments and care based on clinical needs with measure based on quality and effectiveness based on clinical outcomes

advocate that the process of public consultations become strictly time limited and will no longer be permitted to become an excuse for not taking decisions

propose all NHS commissioners will be compelled to seek best value in all that they do. This includes outsourcing of services and a demonstrable commitment to using a mixed economy of care

advocate that within four years commissioners will be required to ensure that adequate care places / facilities are available to look after all our frail and mentally infirm older patients, thus ensuring an end to the problems of delayed discharges

develop mental health services, especially those for younger people, which have been under resourced for many years. Commissioners will be required to apply extra resources to improve this situation.

Conservatives recognise the essential role of GPs and other members of the primary care team. 80% of contacts with the NHS begin and end with primary care. Their involvement in commissioning services and developing new primary care based services is essential. A mixed economy of care can, with skill, deliver top quality services in a timely manner. Changes in working practices in secondary care can deliver a more efficient service with improved access and shorter waiting lists.

Foundation status for our best hospitals can free our doctors and nurses of the bureaucratic constraints which so often impedes their work.

These are goals worth achieving and they can be achieved through the investment and reform that only the Conservative Party can deliver.

Policing ourselves

Conservatives want to see an efficient, effective police service equipped to do its job and earning the respect and support of the entire community.

Everyone must feel safe from crime and the threat of crime.

An improvement in crime detection rates and focussing on the paramilitary crime rackets are two priorities for the police service.

Discrimination is wrong.

Positive discrimination does not correct imbalance, it simply creates more grievances.

The 50/50 recruitment rule is counter productive and is hampering the effectiveness of the police.

We do believe a police service should reflect the community from which it is drawn. However, we would much rather see resources and effort allocated to target recruitment in order to redress imbalance.



Whilst it is right to expect policing matters to be handed to a devolved Assembly, we do not believe the time is yet right.

That time will come when it has been proven the Assembly has a long term future and all parties concerned are living up to their obligations to cease paramilitary activity of any sort.

The 50/50 recruitment rule should end and greater effort be put into recruiting from under-represented sections of the community, be that on the basis of religion, sex or colour.

Developing our potential

On some measures, the Northern Ireland economy has performed well over the last decade, despite political instability and the decline in more traditional industries. GDP growth has been higher than the rest of the UK, total number employed has grown and unemployment has decreased.

However, the NI economy still retains some fundamental problems with higher long-term unemployment than any other UK region, GDP per capita below almost all of the UK and a high dependence on the public sector.

It is heartening to see the growth of SMEs, representing 99% of businesses in Northern Ireland and 79% of employment.

As traditional industries decline and globalisation increases, Northern Ireland's future long term prosperity lies in the creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial skills of our existing and future business people.

Conservatives understand it is people who create wealth, not politicians, and the role of government is to create the framework of stable laws, low tax, light regulation and a high quality infrastructure within which this can take place. A dynamic and competitive economy is ultimately the only means of creating wealth and jobs. This is not only important for those school leavers, graduates and people with ambition in Northern Ireland but also for those currently gaining valuable experience away from home who look to return some day.

Business start ups need help.

Conservatives believe it is vital to

make funds more accessible

simplify the sources of such funding

streamline the procedures in
paperwork and processing

clarify the support available

provide increased business incubator
facilities for start ups

match experienced business people
with those starting out.

Whilst we welcome the amalgamation of the IDB and LEDU into Invest Northern Ireland, we are concerned INI is too bureaucratic and unable to react quickly to opportunities, to such an extent that businesspeople are encouraged not to seek help.

We call for a clearer SME focus within INI and support the call by the Federation of Small Businesses for the extension of the Aspire Micro Loans for Business scheme to the whole of Northern Ireland.

Local business development

Whilst inward investment is welcome, all too often it produces relatively unskilled and transitory jobs, susceptible to changes in business practice and global pressures.

The history of call centres being established and then moving on to Asia is a prime example.

It is up to us and no one else to make our economy successful.

It is the business people of Northern Ireland who kept going through the darkest days of the Troubles, often having to pick themselves up and start again.

This demonstrates the indigenous entrepreneurial spirit that can be harnessed further – business needs to be set free to do what it does best, create wealth, jobs and opportunity.

We welcome the proactive stance taken by the Federation of Small Businesses and recognise the need to

undertake urgent work into the insurance crisis threatening the very existence of many businesses

promote closer links between the Assembly and business representatives

consult on impact of policy on business

explore how Northern Ireland is to maximise business relations with the European Union.

To Euro or not to Euro?

The decision on whether to adopt the Euro is not in the remit of the Assembly but lies at Westminster.

However, we note the eagerness of some parties to push for Northern Ireland to join the Euro or become a dual currency zone.

This is nonsense.

The Conservative Party do not believe the United Kingdom should adopt the Euro. It is vital we retain control of our economy in order to make decisions ourselves based on our own requirements.

This does not mean, however, that we cannot work with and look to Europe for business opportunities. We note, for instance, that both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly have set up European Affairs Committees to, amongst other matters, scrutinise European Union legislation and its implications. We call for a similar arrangement in Northern Ireland and clear lines of responsibility for European matters.



Infrastructure

Infrastructure in Northern Ireland has suffered from years of neglect. We now face a huge task in improving the situation.

Energy costs in Northern Ireland are high. The energy network is still evolving and improvements at Ballylumford and Coolkeeragh will mean cheaper power.

The Republic of Ireland has more choice for energy sourcing and we support the introduction of greater competition in energy supply.

An efficient road network is crucial for business and opening up Northern Ireland to visitors.

Years of neglect need to be addressed, particularly

improving access to Belfast

the Westlink / Donegall Rd / Grosvenor Rd

the Belfast to Newry / Coleraine / Londonderry / Enniskillen.

Water rates must be introduced fairly.

It is incumbent upon central government to upgrade the water and sewerage systems to an acceptable standard before water rates are introduced to pay for running and maintenance.

Once this is completed there is a case to be made for water and sewerage provision to be privatised.

Our Candidates

Julian Robertson is 41 and married with three children. He lives in Bangor and runs his own small business in Holywood. He is currently Northern Ireland Chairman of the Conservative Party. Julian is a passionate campaigner for the establishment of mainstream politics in Northern Ireland. "Politics in Northern Ireland is changing and I want to ensure the Conservative Party is leading that change."

Julian Robertson
North Down



Joanne Johnston
Lagan Valley

Jo is 35 and married. She has two children, Lydia and Eloise, and lives in Moira. Prior to becoming a full time mother, she was a manager with a major UK financial institution. Whilst working in GB she was elected as a Conservative Councillor and was a member of the General Purposes & Finance Committee and the Planning Committee. She was on the Management Committee of her local youth centre and took a keen interest in her local community.



Jason Docherty
South Antrim

Dr. Jason Docherty is 31 years old. He is the Northern Ireland Chairperson of the Democracy Movement, the non-party euro-sceptic campaigning group.

He has recently completed a PhD in politics at Queen's University, entitled, 'Imagining Ulster - Northern Ireland Protestants and Ulster Identity'. He presently works for a media monitoring company."



Terry Dick
East Belfast

Born and bred in East Belfast, Terry has been active in the successful campaign to bring UK national politics to Northern Ireland.

He is a graduate of Queen's University and has international experience, having obtained a higher degree in the USA and worked on the Continent.



Alan Greer
East Antrim

Alan Greer is 24 years old. He works for a magazine publication in Belfast and is soon to complete his studies for a law degree from the University of Ulster, Jordanstown.

The East Antrim Conservative candidate for the Westminster election in 2001, Alan is a passionate campaigner for the establishment of mainstream politics in Northern Ireland.



Roger Lomas
South Belfast

Roger Lomas is 43 and married. He owns & operates a franchise operation specialising in computer consumable recycling in Belfast and lives in the South Belfast area. Prior to becoming a full time retailer he was an IT Contractor working for a number of large London based Private & Government organisations, specialising in databases. When he was working in GB he was elected to a number of Conservative Party positions and took a keen interest in his local community.

The Conservative Party

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