

Ulster Unionist Party

**Northern Ireland
Assembly Election
2022 Manifesto**

**Build a
Better
Northern
Ireland**



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A Message from **Doug Beattie** MC



Northern Ireland is entering a new era

We have the opportunity to truly build a Union of People if we have the courage and vision to strive for better. We can, together, unite people regardless of religion, race, sexual orientation, class or traditional community background to build a better Northern Ireland.

As Ulster Unionists we are offering a confident, positive, pro-union alternative that will work for everyone.

Stormont must be invested in your future, connected, accessible and able to function at pace even during a crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped our society for over 2 years and it is vital that we have politicians who are willing to work together. We must rebuild the NHS, boost economic recovery and tackle the rising cost of living.

Northern Ireland's new era requires fresh leadership. As Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party I am leading a team of exceptional candidates to deliver just that. They come from all walks of life and all community backgrounds. They are united in wanting to contribute to an optimistic vision for Unionism that makes Northern Ireland work for everyone.

In the last number of years the Ulster Unionist Party has demonstrated what competent, principled and cohesive leadership can achieve in our stewardship of the Health Department under Robin Swann.

With your votes we can do more. We can bring that leadership to more Stormont Departments and vitally, we could lead Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug Beattie'. The signature is stylized and fluid, written on a white background.



Health

There is no issue more important than the health and wellbeing of our people. During the political impasse of 2017-2020 the Ulster Unionist Party repeatedly highlighted the serious harm that was being inflicted on our increasingly beleaguered health service.

Long before the conclusion of the last political talks we publicly committed that if given the opportunity we would take the health portfolio. Not for the first time, despite it being passed over by every other political party, the Ulster Unionist Party stepped forward and took the responsibility that others chose to dodge.

The problems in January 2020 were clear – a demoralised workforce, spiralling waiting lists, a lack of strategic vision or direction, and serious & repeated underinvestment in key services. Together those had all contributed to a system that was increasingly fragmented and struggling to adequately deliver services.

This Party knew exactly what it wanted to do when we took up the portfolio. There were some immediate decisions that needed to be taken and there were some systemic issues that needed resolving.

Within days there was real momentum, a renewed positivity building from across the system. Staff felt they had a Minister who was actually listening to them and there was a real focus on steps that needed to be taken to first slow and then ultimately reverse the trajectory of our spiralling waiting lists.

Unfortunately, early 2020 will forever be remembered for the onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The virus came with a devastating cost to Northern Ireland – emotionally, socially and also to the health and social care reforms that we all knew were so desperately needed.

The pandemic has claimed thousands of lives, of whom each and every one was loved and is now sorely missed by family and friends left behind. Yet through the suffering we have repeatedly seen the perseverance and tenacity of our health workers. We have seen a generosity of spirit from across society and we have seen a determination to see it through to brighter days ahead.



The subsequent vaccination programme was an immense logistical challenge, but it worked. There are people across Northern Ireland alive and well today because of it. Our hospitals, whilst still facing immense levels of pressure, were not overwhelmed.

The United Kingdom was the first Western nation in the world to authorise a Covid-19 vaccine, with our subsequent early access to vaccines reiterating the importance and benefit of Northern Ireland's place within the Union. We also saw it with the distribution of PPE earlier in the pandemic, where we supported other parts of the United Kingdom and other parts supported us.

Thanks to the phenomenal efforts of our healthcare workers nine out of every 10 adults in Northern Ireland are now vaccinated, with millions of primary and booster doses delivered. The vaccination programme will undoubtedly be marked as one of the greatest health triumphs of the 21st Century.

So, whilst it was inevitable that much of Robin Swann's two years in office would be taken up responding to the changing demands of the global pandemic, he was still determined to use the opportunity to deliver on a number of key and longstanding Ulster Unionist Party policies for the benefit of all in society.

These are just 30 of the many major achievements this Party delivered from January 2020; 2020

1. We, within the first 3 days of taking the Health portfolio, secured a deal that ended the health service industrial dispute and delivered the immediate restoration of pay parity with England.
2. We increased the number of annual nursing and midwifery places to an all-time high of 1,325, delivering the largest increase to the NI nursing workforce ever seen.
3. We established a new Executive Working Group on Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention to ensure the wider issue was taken on as a collective cross-departmental priority.
4. We topped up the annual pay of all prison healthcare staff with a long overdue additional £1,300 environmental allowance.
5. We brought Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom in relation to blood donation deferral rules.
6. We published the detailed Mental Health Action Plan, with 38 actions including a dedicated specialist perinatal mental health service, the development of managed care networks for child and adolescent mental health services and enhanced support for mental health in primary care.

7. We created the hugely important role of Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland.
8. We made the life-changing drug Kaftrio available across Northern Ireland for the treatment of cystic fibrosis.
9. We announced the establishment of a full statutory public inquiry into the appalling past abuse at Muckamore Abbey Hospital.
10. We introduced a new 'Phone First' service in the Emergency Departments across Northern Ireland to ensure patients got direct access to the right care at the best possible time.

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11. We announced a new pro rata £500 recognition payment scheme for HSC staff with 138,600 staff receiving a total of over £79m.
12. We published an action plan to eliminate hepatitis C in Northern Ireland by 2025.
13. We published the cross-departmental interim Autism Strategy with a clear focus on the provision of services and support for those with autism and their carers.
14. We unveiled a landmark £700m Elective Care Framework setting out a range of immediate, medium term and long term actions for tackling Northern Ireland's hospital waiting lists. In the meantime we also established a Regional Prioritisation Oversight Group to ensure that all available surgical resource is fully optimised.
15. We published a detailed 3 year Cancer Recovery Action Plan detailing the new steps and investment planned between 2021-2024.
16. We brought the Northern Ireland Infected Blood Payment Scheme into greater alignment with the support provided in in England, Scotland and Wales.
17. We announced the introduction of folic acid to flour to help prevent life-threatening spinal conditions in babies.
18. We successfully brought forward the legislation that delivered the closure of the Health and Social Care Board, an overdue abolition first announced in 2016.
19. We published a major new Mental Health Strategy with 35 actions which set the strategic direction for mental health in Northern Ireland for the next decade. An announcement of a new regional Mental Health Crisis Service followed shortly after. We also created an innovative £16m Mental Health Support Fund that assisted 103 charitable organisations with grants ranging from £5,000 to £500,000.
20. We created a £23m support package for domiciliary care and the wider social care sector to enable higher rates of pay.

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21. We delivered an additional £113m in-year pay award for health workers with many staff receiving up to a 4.5% top up in pay. This was on top of the £15m we had already invested in Trust charitable funds to support and enhance staff wellbeing.
22. We launched the far-reaching reform of adult social care, which included 48 specific reform proposals.
23. We secured the legislative banning of smoking in vehicles where children are present, as well as the sale of e-cigs to children.
24. We transformed Northern Ireland's organ donation laws by bringing forward the legislation that at long last brought us into line with the rest of the soft opt-out systems across the United Kingdom, which will increase the number of organs available and ultimately help save countless lives.
25. We developed a scheme that cleared the surgical cataract waiting lists.
26. We oversaw the rollout of mega clinics in every Health and Social Care Trust resulting in over 6,000 consultations and procedures being completed on Saturdays & Sundays.
27. We established the landmark Regional Trauma Network in recognition of the significant mental health impact the Troubles had on victims and survivors in Northern Ireland.
28. We established rapid diagnostic centres to deliver earlier and faster access to diagnostic tests for all patients with suspected symptoms of cancer.
29. We established a co-responding initiative between the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to allow on-call firefighters to respond to cardiac arrest incidents in rural villages and towns
30. We announced the establishment of two rapid diagnostic centres at Whiteabbey and South Tyrone hospitals and published the major 10 year Cancer Strategy with 60 actions to deliver better access to diagnosis, treatment and care

Rebuilding the health service

In January 2020 Northern Ireland had some of the worst hospital waiting times in Europe. Far too many patients were being forced to wait for far too long. This was contributing to an increasingly unfair system whereby people who could afford to pay were treated quickly and those who couldn't were left to wait on increasing lists. Tragically – like virtually every other country in the world - the pandemic had a major impact on our already stretched hospital services.



It is now therefore more important than ever before that we recover from the harm caused and fully restore services as quickly as possible. However, it won't be enough to simply get back to pre-pandemic levels – we need to do more. Much more.

The Ulster Unionist Party wants to see every single opportunity to increase our health service capacity maximised. This Party has already led the way by publishing the detailed 5-year Elective Care Framework which set out a range of short, medium term and long-term actions.

If we are to sustainably rebuild our services we need to look at providing them very differently to how they were delivered before 2020. That includes much greater utilisation of theatre capacity by working longer into the evenings and weekends, supporting and properly incentivising the move towards a genuine 7 day a week health service, and delivering services at scale through the increased rollout of mega multi-disciplinary clinics wherever possible.

If the pandemic has taught us anything it is that there is unquestionably a willingness from both patients and clinicians to travel longer distances if it means receiving care and support in a more timely manner. It is essential that the opportunities currently before us are not lost.

Stabilising the workforce

The greatest asset in the Northern Ireland Health Service is the staff that work within it. In the past however systemic staffing problems were either ignored or deliberately overlooked. Whilst the challenges presented by the pandemic heightened the pressures on the workforce, it didn't cause them. For years prior to the pandemic staff were underpaid, overworked and left feeling increasingly under-valued.

The repeated failure to deliver a better workforce plan in the period between 2014 to early 2020 caused real and quantifiable harm. Given demand for health services was ever increasing and health conditions becoming increasingly complex, too few staff were being trained resulting in a record number of vacant posts.

Unfortunately, staff burn-out and challenges to recruit and retain became increasingly more common. Expenditure on agency costs increased rapidly as Trusts struggled to find and appoint suitably qualified candidates.

Instead of stumbling from one year to the next, with ad hoc increases to training provision, the UUP believes independently audited reports on workforce projections are necessary. These annual reports would look at expected healthcare demands for both 5 and 10 years' time and would make clear recommendations as to what training numbers are necessary. It should be taken as read that any such recommendations should be implemented, especially if we are to avoid the obvious mistakes that have been made in the past.

In the meantime the Ulster Unionist Party would take a number of steps to stabilise the workforce such as introducing a new ban on the use of off-contract agency workers once the immediate HSC pressures subside, stabilise the Trust non-clinical banks and introduce exit surveys for all staff leaving the HSC system to properly monitor the reasons for staff departure to assist with staff recruitment and retention.

The importance, but frailty, of our local primary care system has been acutely demonstrated by the pandemic. For too long primary care was a Cinderella service – awarded platitudes but given little investment or support.

It is the clear view of the Ulster Unionist Party that primary care services are key to helping tackle many of the wider range of problems facing our health and social care system. As the front door for the health service, receiving over 90% of all HSC contacts, it must be given the recognition it deserves. That includes allowing it to deliver a wider range of elective care services, giving it the surety of funding so that it knows it will have the resources to meet ever growing demand, meeting the changing needs of the future workforce and through the use of modern technology making it more accessible to patients.



The role out of the No More Silos initiative shows the progress that can be made when past barriers and avoidable processes are broken down. The UUP wants to see the progress made over the last two years continued and expanded upon. It made absolute sense giving GPs the ability to make direct referrals to secondary care and for rapid diagnostic tests, just as it made sense for GPs to become more closely involved with the delivery of urgent and emergency care. Now we must continue that momentum. We need to get to the next stage of the rollout of multi-disciplinary teams and we need to ensure that we are meeting the training needs of the future workforce.

Improving our mental health

Many people across Northern Ireland are struggling with mental ill health, which is impacting on their life choices and outcomes. It's widely known that Northern Ireland has the highest prevalence of mental health problems in the UK, with a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England.

Tragically the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of the subsequent necessary restrictions has further exacerbated the scale of the challenge. Whilst this Party has delivered more for mental health services over the last two years than was delivered in the entire decade before by other parties – not least with additional funding, the publication of the mental health action plan and strategy, and the creation of the new independent Mental Health Champion role – we know there is still so much more to be done.

The earlier mental health interventions are made the more effective they are known to be for individuals and families. So, the Ulster Unionist Party wants to see teaching the importance of good mental health and emphasising the signs of when to ask for help to become an integral component of the school curriculum. Increasing the funding for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to a minimum of 10% of adult mental health funding will be an important first step. We also know that no single service will suit everyone perfectly. Supporting someone with mental ill health is very different than repairing a broken bone or treating an open wound – we need to ensure that services are person centred and easily moulded to individual circumstances. Finally, the UUP believes it's now time for the delivery of mental health services to be reviewed and transformed. We want to see a single mental health Trust for Northern Ireland – one which would immediately scrap the all the problems of trust boundaries and the postcode lottery of service provision.

Protecting and enhancing our cancer services

The Cancer Strategy will set the strategic direction of cancer services for the next decade. Like so many elements of the Northern Ireland health service, cancer treatments were already in a difficult situation before Covid 19.

Whilst many key cancer services were successfully shielded from the worst impacts of the pandemic, unfortunately we know the number of people presenting with suspected cancer symptoms decreased. It's more important now than ever before that we have the necessary screening programmes in place and we continue the investment on the delivery of extensive public awareness campaigns to highlight the signs and symptoms to look out for.

It's also important that we also rebuild better. The Ulster Unionist Party wants to see a regionally consistent approach to cancer services across Northern Ireland. There is no reason whatsoever as to why any patient living in any part of Northern Ireland should experience unequal access to cancer diagnostics, care, treatment or support. Key to that the Ulster Unionist Party believes is greater collaboration across Trust boundaries, targeted funding for the equalisation of waiting times and the establishment of regional pathways and rapid diagnostic clinics.

Strengthening health service accountability and oversight

The Northern Ireland health service is not only the biggest employer in Northern Ireland, it's also its most important public service. The public, patients and staff deserve to know that they are receiving as high a quality service as possible and that clear lines of accountability and challenge are in place when necessary.

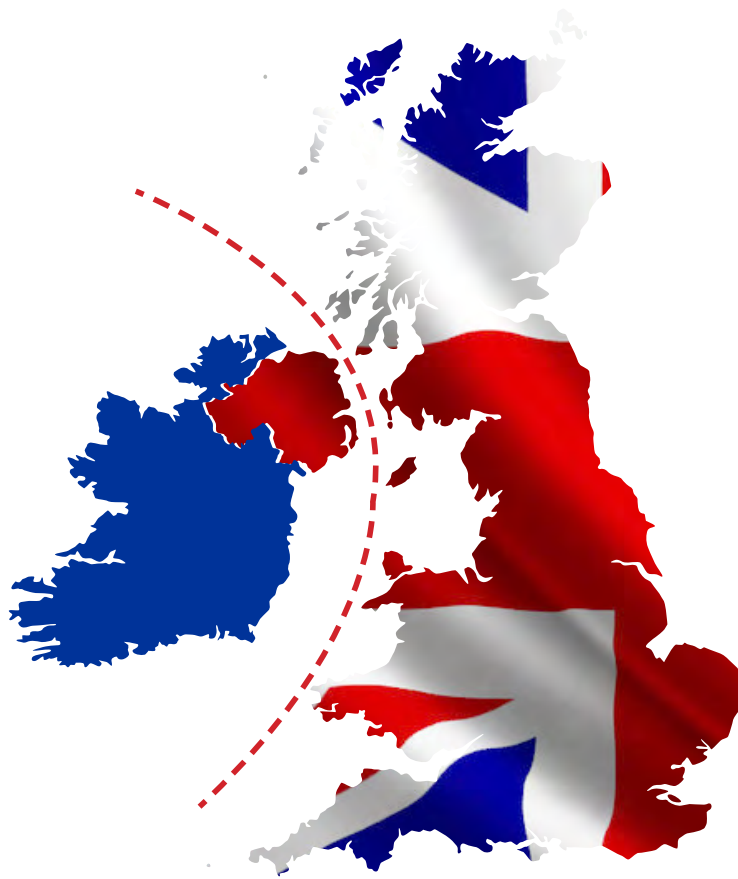
The Ulster Unionist Party believes the time has now come to radically reform the management and day to day oversight of the Northern Ireland health service. For too long key decisions have been delayed, opportunities for improvement lost and sub-optimal Trust performances tolerated. In no other Country would the waiting times that had developed from 2014 be tolerated, nor would the sheer array of problems have been allowed to develop to the extent that they did.



The UUP now believes that the day to day running of our health service should be transferred to a newly created role of a Northern Ireland HSC Chief Executive, one who would be supported by a suitably qualified and experienced senior management team, accountable to a Board with political, professional and civic society membership. Crucially however the Chief Executive would be operationally independent. This would bring us more into line with the operational independence of NHS England and would closely mirror the arrangements for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

It is essential that areas of systemic failure or underperformance are quickly identified and rectified.

There is a pressing need for a new management of our health service in order to deliver much greater meaningful accountability.



Northern Ireland Protocol

Unionists cannot accept an internal border within the United Kingdom. There can be no border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The Ulster Unionist Party warned of the potential hazards of the Northern Ireland Protocol when the 'Explanatory Note-UK proposals for an amended Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland' of 2nd October 2019 was announced. We raised further concerns with the Protocol when the 'Withdrawal Agreement' was published on 17th October 2019.

The Government Command Paper of 21st July 2021 setting out Her Majesty's Government (HMG) latest assessment acknowledges the Protocol is not working as expected. This aligns with the Ulster Unionist concerns from 2019 and our desire to have no added friction either North/South or East/West.

It is with this in mind that the Ulster Unionist Party continues to look for common sense alternatives to the Protocol and, in particular, to ensure there will be no checks on goods travelling GB-NI that will be staying in Northern Ireland and not entering the Republic of Ireland and the European Union Single Market.

Medicines

Medicines must be immediately removed from the scope of the Protocol. If this is not dealt with Pharmaceutical companies will withdraw products in advance of the end of the derogation period due to their lead in times. This is a practical outworking of the Protocol and one that will affect every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland. There is a practical solution, and it must be implemented without delay.

Alternatives

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that to maintain good relations with the European Union (EU) that all sides must strive for a common-sense solution to the problems created by the Protocol. This will address concerns about protecting the EU single market while at the same time protecting Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom's internal market.

Our proposals remain:

- Create a new criminal offence to knowingly export goods designed for the UK Internal Market into the EU Single Market. This was previously proposed by the Ulster Unionist Party in 2019 and now forms part of the UK Command Paper. It creates legislation to protect the EU single market and prohibits, by law, anyone using Northern Ireland to undermine trade between the UK and EU.
- Indemnity for a breach of the single market. The UK could undertake to indemnify the EU if it was found that Northern Ireland had been used to export non-compliant goods via the land border on the island of Ireland into the EU single market.
- Set-up a compliance body Treaty with the Irish Republic in line with the existing structures. This will require some narrow additional devolved powers and will allow for both an educational role by visiting manufacturers and hauliers in both jurisdictions as well as checking the compliance of those exporting to or importing from the EU single market. It would mean using the Belfast Agreement as a tool to fix the problem in respect to cross-border trade by in essence devolving the issue to Northern Ireland to deal with, with the buy in of the UK and EU.

Additional recommendations would include:

- Bespoke SPS Treaty between the UK and EU. A bespoke arrangement could virtually eliminate much of the friction currently being experienced.
- A labelling programme for goods coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. Quite simply this would mean labelling products that are only bound for Northern Ireland and not onto the EU single market as being for "UK sale only".
- UK legislation to ensure companies have a duty to ensure equality of provision to all regions of the UK. This is found in the Command Paper from July 2021 and is lifted from the Ulster Unionist Proposal from February 2021.
- Provisions of Free Ports utilising the unique nature of Foyle Port along with the main sea ports at Larne, Belfast and Warrenpoint. This would not be an extravagant ask as the Free Port would cover separate services in each location allowing for a reduced footprint.

Conclusion

The Ulster Unionist Party wants to create solutions to the problems that we face with the Protocol. It is clear there are some benefits of having access to the EU single market but it cannot be at the detriment to our relationship with the UK internal market. As it stands the Protocol does not protect the Belfast Agreement but instead damages its fine balance creating divisions and frictions.

It is understood there needs to be some form of trading treaty between the UK and EU but this can be achieved through common sense, pragmatic solutions that neither agitate nor undermine either the EU single market or the UK internal market.



Economy

Northern Ireland has a shocking rate of economic inactivity. This means there are too many of our fellow citizens waking up every morning with no proper sense of purpose in their lives, going to bed without the feeling they are living productive, fulfilling lives. The Ulster Unionists believes the economy can help transform those lives, and in doing so, those lives will help transform our economy.

Ulster Unionists will ensure that the next Programme for Government focuses on creating good jobs, with a decent income and security of tenure, satisfying work in the right quantities and decent working conditions. This should be integral to public policy given how this contributes to better health and wellbeing by tackling inequalities, building self-efficacy and combating poverty.

We will:

- **Support City Deals/Growth Deals** - through partnerships between the UK government, local councils and Stormont these deals – the Belfast Region City Deal, Derry- Londonderry and Strabane Region City Deal, Mid South West Growth Deal and Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal – will potentially deliver £1.3 billion in investment using funding principally from Westminster and Stormont.

City Deals/Growth Deals will create global centres of innovation excellence in key growth sectors and will provide opportunities for businesses, located both in and outside Northern Ireland, to collaborate and tap into the world-leading expertise of our universities to create breakthrough technologies, products and services.

- **Back Rates Relief** - Ulster Unionists supported the recent extension of Business Rates holiday in the Assembly with some businesses receiving a further three-month break in payments including retail, hospitality, tourism, leisure, childcare and airports.

We also supported small businesses receiving a discount of between 20% and 50%, depending on the Net Annual Value of their business premises and voted to freeze the regional rate for households and businesses for another year.

We will press for further support for rates relief for businesses in the next Assembly.

- **Skill, Up-Skill and Re-skill** - we are committed to setting-up a Northern Ireland Job Skills Fund – similar to SDS (Scotland) and Skillnet (RoI) – to ensure the proper organisation and funding of job skills training, apprenticeships and life-long learning for all workers.

We envision the Job Skills Fund should have representatives from government, business and trade unions and to direct and provide – through partnerships with FE colleges and universities – targeted skills training aimed at increasing productivity and growing the economy.

We will also ringfence the amount equivalent to what Northern Ireland firms pay in the Apprenticeship Levy for the Skills Fund ensuring ongoing funding of at least £35m a year.

- **Review Invest NI and the Strategic Investment Board** - Ulster Unionists are concerned that Invest NI is not properly focused on strategic sectors like Green Tech and the Digital Economy, duplicates services others provide (like local councils) and is not properly aligned with the strategic aims of the Dept. for the Economy.

We welcome a recently announced review of Invest NI and have engaged positively with the Chair of the review, Sir Michael Lyons. During the next Assembly we will ensure Invest NI is fit for purpose and correctly targeting key economic sectors.

Similarly, ensuring major infrastructure investments are identified, funded and delivered on time is of crucial importance to the economy. The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was constituted over 20 years ago for this purpose. Ulster Unionists believe it is also timely to review the SIB's current functions and strategy to ensure it remains true to its original purpose of leveraging private sector expertise and funding to achieve the Executive's strategic objectives.

- **Take the Lead in the New Green Industrial Revolution** - Two hundred years ago the UK, with Belfast at its heart, led the Industrial Revolution that changed the world. Now, Northern Ireland needs to lead the New Green Industrial Revolution as the world develops, funds and manufactures new 'clean technology' and 'green' energy sources.

Our cherished position within the UK enables us to benefit from funding and technology research announced by Westminster and we will ensure that the next Executive leverages this to ensure Northern Ireland becomes a hub for 'Green Tech' and world-leaders in wind power, hydrogen, electric vehicles, green ships and other technologies.

- **Reduce Corporation Tax** - Northern Ireland isn't yet ready for the devolving of tax powers – a decade plus of DUP/SF fiscal mismanagement has left an inefficient

and stove-piped structure that can't even spend all the money that is allocated to it. And hasn't for a decade.

The Ulster Unionists objective, over the next mandate, will be to demonstrate that Northern Ireland can manage its monies, that we can make the transformation in skills and infrastructure, and if we are to gain any advantage from our dual-market access, progress towards 15% Corporation Tax.

- **Establish 'Freeport Northern Ireland'** - UK government policy is to establish freeports across the United Kingdom. We believe that Northern Ireland must have a Freeport and, due to the geographical situation of Northern Ireland and the effects of the Northern Ireland Protocol, all ports and airports in NI should be designated freeports. This would mean the benefits of a freeport would stretch from Londonderry in the north-west to Aldergrove in the centre, to Warrenpoint in the south-east and up to Belfast and Larne on the east coast.

We also believe a 'Trusted Trader' scheme could be established that would enable businesses outside of the secure port zones to avail of processing relief at zero tariff rates and spread the benefit of a Freeport across Northern Ireland.

- **Review Public Appointments** - All public appointees work hard and are worthy of their appointment. However, Ulster Unionists are concerned that not enough publicly appointed non-executive directors (NEDs) are from the private sector, that some appointees hold positions on multiple public boards simultaneously and that others cycle through one board to another.

We will ensure that the next Executive prepares guidance on public board appointments that will ensure a wider selection of directors, ban multiple appointments and stop re-cycling of individuals from public board to public board.

- **Support Workers Rights** - Ulster Unionists are committed not just to wealth creation and supporting business but also protecting workers rights.

We believe that access to good jobs, where workers have a voice, a decent income, security of tenure, satisfying work in the right quantities and decent working conditions should be integral to public policy given how this contributes to better health and wellbeing by tackling inequalities, building self-efficacy and combating poverty. Ulster Unionists will work closely with the trade union movement as well as business representatives to build a better, prosperous and fair Northern Ireland.



Infrastructure

High quality infrastructure is vital to Northern Ireland’s economic prosperity. There are significant deficiencies in our current infrastructure and there will be further challenges in the future.

Northern Ireland needs to take radical action to remedy historical underinvestment in infrastructure, respond to the climate emergency, prepare for UK Net Zero targets and create an environment conducive to economic growth and prosperity.

Ulster Unionists will:

- **Establish an independent Infrastructure Commission** - which would provide an annual Infrastructure Assessment to the Stormont Executive, additional reports as needed and an Annual Monitoring Report. A recent Ministerial Advisory Panel has concurred with the UUP that a NI Infrastructure Commission is needed but only vague promises have been made so far by the Minister.

The UK’s National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as currently constituted has only responsibility for Northern Ireland where infrastructure responsibilities of Westminster and Stormont interact. The UUP would like to see a discrete unit dedicated to NI set up within the NIC, to be located in Belfast, funded by and reporting to Stormont which would provide robust, well-evidenced and independent advice on infrastructure needs in Northern Ireland.

- **Overhaul the Planning System** – our planning system must be overhauled to enable much needed investment in housing, infrastructure and carbon reduction technologies. Ulster Unionists will introduce a statutory requirement for pre-application discussions for major and regionally significant applications, put

in place statutory timeframes within which statutory consultees must respond to major and regionally significant applications and give planning authorities the right to determine an application without further delay if statutory consultees do not respond, or fail to respond substantively, within the timescales that all parties have previously agreed to.

- **Expedite Transport Investment** – Ulster Unionists will work to implement the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan. We will seek to expedite the A1 Junctions, the York Street Interchange Scheme and explore further options for the A5 road. We will support moves to extend the Glider service to North Belfast and will explore options for new train stops.
- **Prioritise the EV Charging Network** - the Ulster Unionist Party deplores the under-investment in the EV charging network and will make it a priority in the next Executive to rapidly increase the charging network across NI – including making changes to planning regulations to mandate EV charging in new developments and regeneration projects - as part of our fair contribution to the UK's Net Zero commitment.
- **Mutualise NI Water** - Northern Ireland's wastewater and sewage infrastructure has suffered from chronic underinvestment over the last fifteen years. Successive DUP/Sinn Fein controlled Executives have under-funded NI Water to the point where over 130 out of 271 large wastewater treatment works that serve 90 per cent of the population in Northern Ireland are either at or approaching full capacity.

This has led to numerous Unsatisfactory Intermittent Discharges (UIDs) and over seven million tonnes of raw sewage being dumped into NI waters every year. Chronic under-investment has also curtailed housing development across as many as 90 areas and towns in Northern Ireland, severely disrupting the building of much needed new houses – including social and affordable homes.

Ulster Unionists will take decisive action to not only increase water and sewage infrastructure investment but to put NI Water on a sound financial footing to ensure our water and sewage system never again falls into disrepair.

We will change NI Water's structure to the mutual, not-for-profit model using the existing element of our domestic rating system that nominally pays for water infrastructure to provide a revenue stream and allow for NI Water to borrow against its asset base and make multi-year investment plans. There are no plans or need to introduce 'water charges' and Ulster Unionists will continue to oppose this.

Re-structuring of NI Water would also provide it with the funding to adopt all private sewage infrastructure that was built under now defunct planning legislation and left stranded and in disrepair.

- **Review Energy Security and Prices** - the island of Ireland is too small and isolated to conduct an independent energy market and Ulster Unionists will launch a review of energy security and prices with the view to creating an All-Islands energy market whereby Northern Ireland's energy supply and prices are connected to the much bigger, cheaper and more secure energy markets in Great Britain.

Northern Ireland's utilities are currently regulated separately from Great Britain, but Ulster Unionists will consider merging the NI regulator with the UK's Ofgem and Ofwat regulators as an All-Islands energy market is created.

We are also concerned at reports of long delays in gaining permission for grid applications and that fees are much greater than in Great Britain. Ulster Unionists will be asking the Regulator to investigate this and to take urgent, remedial action.

- **Develop Hydrogen as a Fuel** - the Climate Emergency means we must develop new clean and affordable energy sources. Hydrogen may be suitable to add to or replace methane as a home heating fuel and to power Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) and buses. The UK government has published a Hydrogen strategy, outlining an ambition for 5GW of low carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030 and has established a £240 million Net Zero Hydrogen Fund to fund development of production and technologies.

Northern Ireland is particularly well suited to produce hydrogen as it has ample sources of water and renewable energy needed to produce the clean 'Green' version. Ulster Unionists will encourage the development of Hydrogen as part of Northern Ireland's energy strategy and will work closely with the UK government to ensure NI has a fair share of national investment funds.



- **Complete Un-Adopted Roads** - Un-adopted roads are those roads that the Department of Infrastructure has not taken ownership of after a housing development has been completed or, more usually, those roads that a developer has not finished to the required standard because the development was not completed, or the developer went bankrupt during construction.

Ulster Unionists are concerned that there are nearly 3,000 un-finished and un-adopted roads in Northern Ireland, with as much as £100m of bonds extant. We are disappointed at the Dept. of Infrastructure's tardiness to pursue the bond issuers and have roads and essential infrastructure completed and adopted as public facilities.

We will prioritise the completion of un-adopted roads in the next Assembly and will target the Dept. of Infrastructure to actively seek to draw down bonds. If the Department does not have the resources to adequately ensure bond drawdowns, we will direct the Department to explore alternative methods to achieve drawdown and enable completion of roads and vital infrastructure.

- **Clear the MOT Backlog** - the MOT test system is essential to ensure public safety and the road worthiness of vehicles. Ulster Unionists are concerned at the continued failure of the infrastructure department to ensure timely MOT tests – the delay is now over four months and shows no sign of abating.

Ulster Unionists are proposing that Temporary Exemption Certificates (used at the height of the pandemic) be used again to allow for the backlog to be cleared. As soon as the pressure on the system is relieved, we would expect the testing schedule to revert to the present system of testing at 4 years and every year thereafter.

We will also have the Department explore the option of allowing private garages to deliver MOT testing, under a strict compliance and oversight system as operates in Great Britain.



Education

The education of our children has been a priority of the Ulster Unionist Party since the founding of Northern Ireland one hundred years ago. From the first Ulster Unionist Education Minister Lord Londonderry in 1921 to the last, Basil McIvor in 1974 we have attempted to create a religiously united school system. Now, 23 years after the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement it is finally time to properly unite our schools and establish a multi-denominational single education system that is efficient, fit for purpose and capable of preparing our young people for the modern world.

Ulster Unionists will:

- **Establish A Single Education System** - Ulster Unionists believes the current Controlled education sector is the best example of the way forward for a single education system for Northern Ireland.

The Controlled sector is large, diverse open to all and multi-denominational. Wholly funded and 'controlled' by the state it already educates nearly 150,000 young people across 552 schools and employs 8,700 teachers. Many different schools are provided for – nursery, primary, secondary, grammar, special, Integrated and Irish-medium. All recent surveys show that educational quality and a school close to home rate as the top priorities for parents when choosing a school. The controlled sector model and its success in attracting pupils from a diverse background (61% protestant, 10% catholic, 29% other) whilst prioritising educational quality and shows what can be achieved.

All state-funded schools should be placed in a newly created 'United' system with a re-invigorated Education Authority as the sole agency responsible for the provision

education system would be respectful of the historic and denominational origins of many schools and would not interfere with the ethos or tradition of each school but would encourage each institution to actively recruit pupils from a varied religious, cultural and economic background.

The creation of a single education system would enable many efficiencies, reduce duplication and enable an ambitious and radical programme of change.

- **Tackle Educational Under-Achievement** - we are committed to addressing educational underachievement in Northern Ireland and to ensuring that all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life.

We acknowledge the particular challenges facing children and their families in disadvantaged communities and note the persistent and unacceptable attainment gap at GCSE between Protestant and Catholic pupils entitled to free school meals and those not entitled to free school meals. This attainment gap was 29 percentage points for 2018-19 (pre-covid), representing an improvement of only 3 percentage points since 2005-06, based on the percentage of school leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs at grade A*-C or above including English and Maths.

The Ulster Unionist Party notes the final report and action of the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement ('A Fair Start') which highlighted the importance of redirecting the focus to Early Years and creating a seamless journey from pregnancy to pre-school, school and beyond, where every child is provided with the appropriate level of support needed in a timely and appropriate manner in order to realise their potential.

We believe that, as the international evidence confirms, investing in our youngest children even before they are born, is the most cost-effective strategy, bringing long-term benefits to children, especially those most at risk. Starting at three or four is already too little, too late for our most disadvantaged families.

We would like to develop a digital system which captures every child's life journey from pre-birth to leaving education. This system would allow early identification of matters pertaining to health, education and wellbeing which we know are considerable contributors to the life outcomes of all children. Practitioners from education or health would have different levels of access with the main intent of the system being the wellbeing and support of each individual child regardless of their background.

We therefore support greater policy focus and investment in our youngest children, investing in the developmental role of health visitors, and ensuring the appropriate sharing of information between health and education to ensure that transitions into education and between educational phases are supported. We also recommend greater collaboration between health and education to develop further the services to identify and assess children's developmental delay and/or SEN.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that addressing underachievement requires cross-departmental collaboration and authentic partnership between schools, communities

and families at all stages of a child's life. While we welcome the Independent Review of Education's focus on post-primary transfer and strongly support calls to review the existing system of high-stakes tests, we believe that this contentious issue should not divert our attention away from investing in our youngest children.

- **Support Special Educational Needs** - It is universally accepted that Northern Ireland is badly served for Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision. The ongoing Independent Review of Education is well placed to highlight this deficiency and recommend concrete steps to remedy this unacceptable situation.

The Ulster Unionist Party will actively support well-informed proposals to turn around SEN provision. We believe that if we achieve "A Better Start For All" that there will be a more seamless introduction for children entering the schools system if they have any additional needs identified early and requisite support in place. The growing log jam of children requiring assessment and a statement of need could be eliminated with early identification and support.

Post Education support for pupils moving from Special schools is an area of priority for the Ulster Unionist Party. We know that each pupil leaving the special educational system will have varying degrees of need for support however we believe that every pupil deserves the opportunity to live their best life and avail of further education, support, training or employment as appropriate to their needs and dreams. We will develop a strategy that better provides for post education provision.

- **Confront the Mental Health Crisis** - the need for good Mental Health is gaining increasing attention in our society and especially so among young people and in our schools. Northern Ireland still labours under the malign influence of the 'Troubles' and the continuing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health problems across society and among young people and pupils.

The Ulster Unionist Party has been working closely with young persons' mental health advocates who have been campaigning for mental health education and early intervention in Northern Ireland's primary and secondary schools. We will ensure going forward that mental health services provision will be given greater emphasis in the curriculum and across all aspects of education. The need to get up stream to build resilience and wellbeing is a priority as will be the provision of counselling for pupils in a model which is both effective and sustainable.

- **Overcome Pandemic Learning Gap** - as previously noted, concerning mental health, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt the Health Service, the economy and wider society. Education provision has also been severely disrupted and is of great concern to the Ulster Unionist Party.

Ofsted have published data showing regression in some basic skills and learning,



some children have lost stamina in reading and writing, some have lost physical fitness and others show signs of mental distress, including an increase in eating disorders and self-harm. Ofsted also expressed concern about children who were out of sight during school closures, with falling referrals to social care teams raising fears that domestic neglect, exploitation or abuse was going undetected.

Ulster Unionists will ensure that a detailed, multi-year and properly funded plan is prepared by the Dept. of Education to overcome the learning gap created by the pandemic and implemented urgently.

- **Research Post Primary Transfer** - Ulster Unionists value our Grammar schools and accept that a form of post primary transfer is necessary. We welcome the recent interim announcement that a single common post-primary transfer test is to replace the current two.

Notwithstanding our support for Grammar Schools, we would like research to be conducted to see if a new method of transferring Year 7 pupils based on continual assessment of pupils is possible. We believe that through our strategy "A Better Start For ALL" and the creation of a digital pupil profile, that a methodology can be created to ensure each pupil goes to the school best suited for them without a high stakes test at age 10-11.

- **Review Secondary School Funding** - Secondary schools provide the backbone of education and skills development for the majority of pupils across the sector. There can be no doubt that in recent years Secondary schools have not been supported nor recognised regarding the tremendous work they do and the continued educational standards they produce against a backdrop of continued financial pressures.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes a review of the buildings, facilities and staffing is needed into the secondary sector and investment re-directed where it is most needed. Therapeutic environments are conducive to good learning and excellent examples of transformation and regeneration exist which we will build on by identifying good/best practice and ensuring that schools both - urban and rural - are supported and championed.

- **Support Our Teachers** - Ulster Unionists value the outstanding work our teachers and support staff do in our schools. We are particularly appreciative of the special effort they have put in during the pandemic.

We want to give practical support to teachers and in the next Assembly we will be calling for more Continuous Personal Development (CPD) (or Teachers Professional Learning (TPL) as sometimes called) to be available to teachers and that it be better funded and better delivered than at present.

Pedagogy, the theory and practice of learning, must also be given greater emphasis within our education system and Ulster Unionists will be pressing for teachers to have greater access to new methods of teaching and more encouragement and funding to avail of it.

- **Provide for Lifelong Learning** - nothing stays the same for long in the modern world and we can no longer rely on having a job for life or earn a living in the same company or sector all our working lives.

Our children must be taught to recognise this, and our education system needs to be re-calibrated to support lifelong learning not just GCSE's and A levels.

Ulster Unionists want a new strategy for sixth form and 14–19-year-olds that takes this into account in the context of Further Education opportunities and the wider Skills Agenda in business and commerce.

We will make Lifelong Learning a key component of our Education policy in the next Assembly.

- **Examine Free School Meals for Primary School Children** - Ulster Unionists will have the Dept. for Education conduct a review of Free School Meals during the next Assembly with a view to providing a free meal every day to all primary age children.

A daily Free School Meal for every child would enable Northern Ireland to start tackling child poverty and ensure that no child goes hungry. Broader benefits would include increasing healthy eating across the whole school, widening the range of food pupils eat, enhancing social skills at mealtimes, and improvements to conduct and achievement.

Universal free school meals for young learners would also go some way to achieving Net Zero targets through prioritising local food producers.

Eligibility for Free School Meals is an important indicator of social disadvantage for many government policies and strategies, but we are confident that other measures can be devised for this.

- **Reduce the Cost of School Uniforms** - school uniforms help foster a sense of belonging and unity, improve discipline and remove the peer pressure on pupils to wear the latest fashions.

However, school uniforms can become unaffordable for some parents if the school uniform policy specifies clothing that is expensive, difficult to source or only available from a narrow list of suppliers.



Statutory guidance by the Dept. for Education on school uniforms can ensure that parents will not have to think about the cost of a school uniform when choosing which school to apply for, make sure that branded items are kept to a minimum and that cost and value for money are given the highest priority when schools are appointing suppliers.

Ulster Unionists will bring forward legislation that will give the Department for Education powers to issue statutory guidance on school uniforms similar to recent legislation in England, if unnecessary burdens continue to be placed on parents.



Communities

We want to play our part in achieving true gender equality. We want to create a world where women have equal opportunities, equal pay, are protected from discrimination and are safe and respected. We will:

- Commit that we will work to remove barriers to women's participation in employment, providing accessible, affordable childcare and access to education, training and transport.
- Move to enhanced flexible working and parental leave reserved for both parents
- Make progress towards gender responsive budgeting
- Protect and provide financial guidance and support as women approach retirement age
- Ensure that legislation tackling violence against women and girls is kept up to date and is both robust and responsive to developing challenges
- Provide age-appropriate universal sex and relationships education in schools and educational institutions
- Maintain momentum in IVF treatment availability. Ulster Unionists are proud to have secured the commitment of providing up to 3 publicly funded cycles of IVF treatment in the NDNA. We've brought fertility lists back down to pre-pandemic levels and we've made real progress in putting in place the staffing and infrastructure to deliver the additional cycles.

- Ensure Northern Ireland will play a leading role in the UK Menopause Taskforce to strengthen coordination and raise awareness of the menopause and its impact across the UK, under the shared aim of improving care and support for women experiencing the menopause.

LGBTQ

The next mandate must be one of delivery by the Assembly and Executive for the LGBTQ community. The last mandate saw progress in equality for our LGBTQ community in Northern Ireland and we were proud to play our part in equalising the rules on MSM blood donation in line with the rest of the United Kingdom, initiating a review of Gender Identity Services and bringing forward a motion which saw Northern Ireland become the first region of the UK to have its legislature endorse a ban on conversion therapy.

A Sexual Orientation Strategy must finally underpin cross-cutting delivery by departments. The next mandate must finally deliver on a Sexual Orientation Strategy. Northern Ireland continues to lag behind in many areas and delivery must come in the next Assembly.

Our priorities:

- Ban the practice of conversion therapy in Northern Ireland.
- Introduce a policy of zero new HIV diagnoses by 2030.
- Ensure our transgender population and those who are questioning have access to timely information, services, support and care.
- Provide fertility services that are accessible to all without discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation.
- Ensure equal access to adoption and/or fostering
- Implement a zero-tolerance approach to hate crimes and harassment, whether in person or online, in our schools and educational institutions
- Introduce universal Age-appropriate relationships and sex education

Housing

A safe, warm, affordable house is a necessity of life, and the Ulster Unionist Party is committed to ensuring everybody in Northern Ireland has an appropriate, well-heated and affordable home. Unfortunately, over 40,000 people in Northern Ireland are on the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) waiting list of whom 30,000 are in 'housing stress'. Only approximately 2,000 social or affordable home are being built every year, nowhere near enough to fix this growing problem. Northern Ireland deserves better.

Ulster Unionists will:

- **Strategically Reconfigure Housing Delivery** - through the development of a robust but ambitious social housing strategy that will create the infrastructure to work towards delivering thousands of new social housing units per year.

- **Emphasise Housing in the Executive** - we will make Housing a stand-alone issue in the new Programme for Government (PfG) and ensure multi-year budgets are agreed.
- **Use Public Sector Land for Social Housing** - suitable land and for housing development is scarce in Northern Ireland and we will mandate the Executive to have all government bodies and departments search their property portfolios for suitable, un-used land and buildings to release at cost price for social and affordable housing developments.
- **Mutualise NI Water** - infrastructure under-investment over many years is a huge block to new social and affordable housing developments and elsewhere in this document we set out how we will reform NI Water to enable it to direct massive, multi-year and sustainable investment into Northern Ireland's water and sewage services.
- **Fund Decarbonisation of Social Housing** - Ulster Unionists are committed to Climate Change mitigation and supporting the UK's target of Net Zero by 2050. The UK government at Westminster has launched a £3.84bn Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and we will demand that the next Executive ringfences Northern Ireland's share of this fund, working towards a Net Zero carbon future while also supporting local jobs and businesses.
- **Reform the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)** - by separating its regulatory function from housing management and development. We believe the NIHE should be structured so that it can raise private sector finance leveraging its assets and rent roll. Monies raised can then be invested in upgrading existing stock and building new social and affordable housing, creating a virtuous circle.

Additionally, we will launch a review of the current system of housing needs assessment by the NIHE to ensure there is a fair assessment of all areas and the real housing needs in each area.

- **Build More Private Homes** - Ulster Unionists will implement the recent Housing Strategy with an aim to build at least 9,500 private homes per year for the next 15 year. We will also enhance Co-Ownership Housing's investment plans and press for a new category of Intermediate Rent of high quality, well managed, affordable homes for rent for tenants who cannot or do not wish to access home ownership.

Cost of Living Crisis and Fuel Poverty

The Russian Federation's war on Ukraine will inevitably produce a new world order. While the shape of things to come may take time to become clear, the impact on the cost of living is immediately apparent. This will impact everyone's standard of living, with the vulnerable worst affected.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes there is much that government can do to help at council, regional and national level. The UK Government can address issues such as energy costs. We support the lowering of fuel duty for all, with an additional rebate for essential users, not least carers who travel extensively to provide vital support to those who are unable to look after themselves.

At Assembly level, we should ensure home heating oil provision comes under the remit of the Utility Regulator of Northern Ireland, ensuring parity of regulation with gas and electricity. The Assembly must also work in tandem with local councils to identify need, tailoring support packages for those most exposed to the impact of the cost of living.

Ulster Unionists have long been concerned at fuel poverty and its effect on those on low incomes. We have consistently called for the Communities Minister to establish a Fuel Poverty Task Force and will ensure one is set-up early in the new mandate. We will also work to have the GB 'Warm Homes Discount' rolled out in Northern Ireland, in addition to the Winter Fuel Payment. The Warm Homes Discount is a sum of money credited to an electricity (and in some circumstances gas) account of the eligible recipient. In winter 2021/2022 this amounted to £120.

We will:

- Ensure Home Heating is brought under remit of the Utility Regulator
- Work in tandem with local councils to identify need and tailor packages
- Call on Westminster to lower fuel duty for all, with additional rebate for essential users, not least care workers
- Establish a Fuel Poverty Task Force
- Work to introduce 'Warm Homes Discount' to Northern Ireland

Standalone Loneliness Strategy

We have called on the Executive to appoint a lead Department to take forward a standalone loneliness strategy.

Loneliness can affect any one of us, young or old and we want to see the development of a meaningful intervention through a properly resourced strategy. It was already a problem for many people prior to the pandemic, but the impact of the lockdowns and work from home advice brought the issue of loneliness and isolation to the fore for many more as social connections for almost all of society were impacted.



This is an issue which cuts across all age groups, social classes and political or religious affiliations and our call for a standalone loneliness strategy should be supported by all parties.

Making Northern Ireland Accessible

Ulster Unionists support the introduction of Changing Places Toilet (CPT) facilities in Northern Ireland and will initiate the necessary legislation. England already has over 1,500 facilities which meet the needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities as well as people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis.

Further to our support for CPT facilities we will set up a £5m Accessibility fund to offer Northern Ireland councils match funding to adapt and improve access to non-residential buildings and premises for disabled people.

Ulster Unionists will also initiate a review of existing Disability Discrimination legislation with a view to updating the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) taking into account the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) as ratified by the UK in 2006. We will:

- Introduce Changing Places legislation to Northern Ireland
- Set-up up a £5m Accessibility Fund to adapt and approve access to buildings for disabled people
- Review the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 with a view to updating

Gambling Regulation

For most people gambling is a harmless and enjoyable activity but for a small minority it can become addictive and devastate families. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has estimated the social cost to government across the UK from problem gambling is between £260 million and £1.2 billion (health, welfare and employment, housing, and criminal justice) against the £3 billion generated from betting and gaming duties.

The Assembly has recently passed much needed legislation principally concerning the reform of opening hours, prize draws and updating the government's powers of regulation for physical bookmakers, but more is needed.

It is intended that the next Assembly considers further legislation regarding the gambling industry and Ulster Unionists are supportive of this. We will:

- Establish a Gambling Commission - we believe that a gambling regulator should be established in Northern Ireland and will suggest that the Gambling Commission, which currently regulates individuals and businesses that provide gambling in Great Britain, including the National Lottery, should have its remit extended to cover NI.
- Limit Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) – these machines have been shown to be the most destructive form of gambling with recent Gambling Commission research revealing as many as 50% of FOBT players are problem or at-risk gamblers. It is disgraceful that Northern Ireland currently has no limits on maximum stakes on FOBTs and Ulster Unionists will legislate to limit stakes to £2 in line with Great Britain.
- Regulate Online Gambling - we will also ensure further gambling legislation contains measures to regulate online gambling and that self-exclusion schemes and spending cap options are mandatory for bookmakers as in GB.

Sub-regional stadia

Football is a very popular sport in Northern Ireland as evidenced by the success of the IFA men's and women's senior teams, the world-famous Green and White Army (#GAWA) of song-singing supporters and our long line of elite players like George Best, Pat Jennings, Norman Whiteside and David Healy.



Back in 2011 the NI Executive first agreed to provide funding for the redevelopment of sub-regional football grounds, but this has still not happened.

The more recent New Decade, New Approach deal also called for investment in football stadia but again the DUP/Sinn Fein controlled Executive has failed to deliver.

- Ulster Unionists will prioritise the refurbishment of sub-regional stadia across Northern Ireland in the new Assembly and will ensure the release of the promised £36.2m in funding.

Children's Funeral Fund

The death of a child is a devastating event for any family and the cost and organisation of a funeral can be overwhelming for parents, particularly those that are on low incomes.

Ulster Unionists have long argued that a Children's Funeral Fund (CFF) should be set up by Stormont whereby all fees for burials and cremations would be waived by local councils and met instead by funding from Stormont. The CCF would also provide for associated expenses, including the costs of a coffin, shroud or casket.

The CFF would run in parallel with the Social Fund Funeral Expenses Payment scheme which enables persons on qualifying benefits to apply for financial support for a burial or cremation. It is not expected that claims could be made under both schemes, but the Funeral Expenses Scheme may enable further contributions to a funeral.

Any family choosing to make the funeral arrangements themselves, without using a funeral director, would be able claim directly for the associated expenses provided for by the CFF.

We are pleased that the Department for Communities has brought forward this proposal shortly before Stormont dissolved.





Agri-Foods

The farming and the agri-foods industries are vital to Northern Ireland and to the wider United Kingdom. We send nearly half our produce to Great Britain and feed 10 million people across the UK annually.

The agri-food sector is critical to rural areas and balanced regional development, with the recent independent review of the sector finding that 86% of agri-food processors are based outside Belfast and almost 26,000 farm businesses operate in rural settings.

Ulster Unionists greatly value the contribution our farmers make to society, and we are determined to support our rural communities.

We will use the next Assembly to:

- **Develop** a productive, progressive agriculture and fishing industry focused on profitability, sustainability, and resilience.
- **Support** the production of high-quality climate friendly food while transitioning to a net zero carbon society where agriculture and the environment can thrive in harmony whilst sustaining rural communities and businesses.
- **Invest** in science, technology, knowledge transfer and training, to give farmers the tools to become more efficient and sustainable and to support the unique family farm structure in Northern Ireland.
- **Utilise** data capture and processing to underpin and evidence the environmental credentials of the industry to position Northern Ireland as a viable, profitable, environmentally sustainable agri-food region, capitalising on our soil as a valuable asset.

- **Grow** a circular economy linking farming, food, energy, and health, delivering green growth and exploring new opportunities in areas such as natural fibres and bio-composites.
- **Work** with the industry and stakeholders to ensure farmers' opinions on climate change and the environment are properly considered by policy makers to deliver on all pillars of sustainability; economic, environmental, and social.

The Climate Emergency



The Ulster Unionist Party has declared a Climate Emergency and joined with other parties to put forward a Climate Change Bill. Northern Ireland has been the only part of the UK not to have Climate Change legislation and the Bill would have mandated the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive to prepare Climate Action Plans and join with the rest of the UK in Climate Change mitigation.

Subsequently, the Dept. of Agriculture, Environment Rural Affairs (DAERA) Minister brought forward a second, official Climate Change bill and Ulster Unionists worked to amalgamate both bills to ensure a 'best of all worlds' final legislative solution. We were disappointed that the final bill did not

contain our proposal that Northern Ireland's 'fair contribution' to the UK Net Zero greenhouse gas target should be 82% by 2050.

Northern Ireland is a significant net exporter of agri-food products with nearly 50% of all agri-food products produced in Northern Ireland consumed in the rest of the UK. As the smallest region within the UK Northern Ireland supplies a disproportionate amount of food, feeding approximately 10 million citizens in the UK annually. The independent Climate Change Committee has stated that for the UK to reach the Net Zero target a fair contribution from NI would be an 82% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 compared to 1990 levels.

The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes this intervention from the independent committee and will continue to target an 82% or better reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 for Northern Ireland as part of our ongoing climate mitigation strategy.

The next five years are the most important in mitigating Climate Change and Ulster Unionists will ensure Northern Ireland makes a 'Fair Contribution' to the goal of UK Net Zero.

New Green industrial Revolution

The UK government has launched a Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution which brings together ambitious policies and significant new public investment, while seeking to mobilise private investment. Two centuries ago, the United Kingdom, with Belfast and this region at its heart, led the world's first Industrial Revolution and by investing in clean technologies – wind, carbon capture, hydrogen and many others – the UK intends to lead the world into a New Green Industrial Revolution.

The scale, expense and technological changes and investments needed to enable Northern Ireland to contribute to the race to Net Zero and to build a New Green Industrial Revolution is such that they can only be achieved through our cherished position in the United Kingdom.



The Responsible Party of Unionism

The Ulster Unionist Party, as the responsible party of Unionism, is committed to Northern Ireland contributing its fair share to the UK's Net Zero commitments and to delivering a New Green Industrial Revolution through working closely with Her Majesty's Government in Westminster, the private sector, the City of London and the other devolved administrations to ensure that the nationally announced plans and investments are delivered and funded fully in Northern Ireland.

As the responsible party of Unionism, the UUP will put the Climate Emergency and the New Green Industrial Revolution at the heart of government and ensure the Executive Office and the First and Deputy First Ministers take responsibility for driving through the crucial decisions necessary to ensure NI makes a fair contribution to mitigating climate change and deliver jobs and prosperity through new technologies and industries.

Northern Ireland has fallen behind the rest of the UK in combating climate change and preparing for the New Green Industrial Revolution. The current DUP/Sinn Fein led Executive has failed on this and other crucial issues and the Ulster Unionist Party intends to be the new broom sweeping away the failures of the past and delivering on the promise of the future.

Cycling

The UUP Environment Minister in 2015 outlined the kind of cycling community we would like to see over the next 25 years, with the publication of 'Northern Ireland Changing Gear – a Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland' which had the vision of 'a community where people have the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle for everyday journeys'.

We remain committed to our cycling vision and in the next Executive we will implement the Strategic Plan for Greenways and fund the development and improvement of urban and rural Greenways and the National Cycle Network across Northern Ireland.

Woodlands

Trees and woods capture carbon and provide habitats where wildlife can thrive. However, Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of woodland cover in the UK and is one of the worst countries globally for the loss of nature. We need to tackle climate change and the loss of nature together as climate change contributes to the loss of nature, and the loss of nature exacerbates climate change and its effects.

Ulster Unionists will plant more of the right trees in the right places and do more to look after the trees and woods we already have. This will help Northern Ireland make a fair contribution to UK's efforts to tackle climate change whilst also helping nature to recover, reducing the risk of flooding, creating new green jobs, and improving access to trees and woods for everyone to enjoy.





Justice

The Ulster Unionist Party has always been a Party of law and order, no ifs, buts or maybes.

One of the key components of any liberal democracy is its adherence to the rule of law and a properly functioning justice system.

For the system to operate as intended, it must inspire and retain public confidence.

Ulster Unionists will:

- **Reinforce the Police** - Ulster Unionists remember the many men and women who served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, especially those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep Northern Ireland safe from those intent on its destruction.

We continue in our support for delivering the headcount of 7,500 officers proposed by the Independent Commission for Policing in Northern Ireland over twenty years ago ("A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland". September 1999).

We believe that 500 additional police officers should be recruited over the next 3 years, in addition to the normal recruitment to replenish leavers, and will be pressing for this target to be properly financed in the next Assembly's multi-year budget.

- **Speed Up the Courts** - there is a widespread public perception that courts are too often reluctant to impose sentences that fit the crime. Even when stronger sentences are available, courts all too often impose sentences at the lower end of the scale.

The public is also left frustrated at the ease with which bail is granted and the number

of defendants with multiple convictions who regard prison as an occupational inconvenience.

Deterrence seems an alien concept to our system.

Ulster Unionists will press for stronger sentences particularly for habitual, violent re-offenders and work to speed up the administration of justice and the time between arrest and sentencing.

- **Stand By Victims** - all too often victims have been regarded as an afterthought by our justice system, as the focus turns to the 'rights' of the victim makers.

Victims need to see a change in culture within the justice system whereby the State is seen to be fulfilling its duty of protecting law abiding citizens, the police solve crimes, courts hand out meaningful sentences and victims are given the support they need.

The Ulster Unionist Party enthusiastically campaigned for the full implementation of the Hart recommendations for victims and survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse, as we did for the WAVE Trauma Centre's call for a bespoke payment scheme for those injured in our Troubles. We again support WAVE's call for a full consultation on the options WAVE proposes for greater recognition for those bereaved in conflict-related incidents.

- **Initiate Legislation** - the Assembly has proved painfully slow at passing long overdue legislation on key issues, not least with regard to Hate Crime and stalking.

We must be proactive in updating local legislation in line with best practice elsewhere where obvious gaps are identified, such as Charlotte's law.

- **Oppose an Amnesty** - 24 years after the Belfast Agreement, the Legacy of the Troubles continues to cast a shadow over Northern Ireland.

We have been consistent in our opposition to the Stormont House Agreement legacy proposals because we believe them to be fundamentally flawed for a number of reasons, one of which was that they would represent a de facto amnesty for all crimes up to, but not including murder.

We do not support the Government's current proposals which would amount to an amnesty for all Troubles related offences. We realise that the prospects of successful prosecutions dwindle with the passing of time – some cases are more than half a century old - but we would never seek to deny families the prospect of getting a measure of justice, and therefore we do not support an amnesty of any sort.

It would appear that Truth and Justice have become new theatres of conflict. We are determined to prevent the rewriting of history whereby the State, the police and the Army are made out to be the villains of the Troubles and not the Terrorists who were responsible for 90 per cent of Troubles related deaths.

- **Reduce Legal Aid costs and Lawfare** - the legal aid bill in Northern Ireland is out of all proportion to the size of this Province costing over £63m a year according to the latest available figures.

In spite of efforts to reduce the size of the bill, it is proving difficult to achieve a successful resolution.

The situation is not helped by the culture of lawfare which has been allowed to develop within our legal system and which has proved extremely lucrative for a number of firms. More progress must be made to reduce the legal aid bill.

We have previously called for a comprehensive review of legal aid in Northern Ireland to forensically address the issue of a legal aid system that is by far the most generous in the whole of the UK. The will simply does not seem to be there, there is no appetite or ability to challenge the status quo that serves vested interests so well. That has to change, and all options should be on the table, including capping the legal aid bill and capping what solicitors can charge for certain cases.

- **Challenge Serious and Organised crime** - far too many communities across Northern Ireland are plagued by organised criminal gangs which are involved in serious criminal activity including drug dealing.

Some are regarded as paramilitary or terrorist in nature, claiming a spurious political motivation in a bid to gain some kind of legitimacy, whilst others are simply the type of organised criminal enterprises that exist in major cities in the Republic and in Great Britain.

Almost 25 years on from the Belfast Agreement, it is incomprehensible that so-called paramilitary gangs are still in existence. These groups need to be put out of business permanently. We want to see a concerted effort against the leadership of such groups with a focus on arrests and seizure of assets to reassure the public that crime really does not pay.

- **Resource Prisons** - the loss of personal liberty is the ultimate sanction available to the UK State for those who have broken the law and who have damaged society.

Whilst rehabilitation is important where possible, we must also be mindful of the need to punish, protect society, and deter others.

We want to see our Prison Service given the resources they need - including personnel - and to ensure that staff are supported as they seek to do a very difficult and stressful job on behalf of the rest of society.



**Ulster
Unionist
Party**



YOUR Ulster Unionist Party Candidates



Roy Beggs
East Antrim



John Stewart
East Antrim



Steve Aiken
South Antrim



Paul Michael
South Antrim



Bethany Ferris
North Antrim



Robin Swann
North Antrim



Glenn Barr
Upper Bann



Doug Beattie MC
Upper Bann



Stephen McCarthy
South Belfast



Andy Allen
East Belfast



Lauren Kerr
East Belfast



Julie-Anne Corr-Johnston
North Belfast



Linsey Gibson
West Belfast



Alan Chambers
North Down



Naomi McBurney
North Down



Jill Macauley
South Down



Rosemary Barton
Fermanagh & South Tyrone



Tom Elliott
Fermanagh & South Tyrone



Ryan McCready
Foyle



Robbie Butler
Lagan Valley



Laura Turner
Lagan Valley



Darryl Wilson
East Londonderry



David Taylor
Newry & Armagh



Mike Nesbitt
Strangford



Philip Smith
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