

Alliance Works

Working for You
at Westminster



MANIFESTO

Westminster Elections

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Alliance

6th MAY 2010

Message from David Ford

Welcome to the Alliance Party Manifesto for the 2010 Westminster Election.

This is the first Westminster Election in a generation taking place in the context of a fully functioning devolved Assembly and Executive. Decision-making power over policy and resourcing on a wide range of issues, from health to education, from the environment to justice, now lie in local, more accountable hands.

These issues are no longer determined by those representatives whom we elect to Westminster. Instead, it is critical that those whom you choose to represent you are capable of fighting for the best deal for Northern Ireland from the UK Government, for reflecting your views within national debates, and ensuring that we make our contribution to a progressive, ethical foreign policy.

With scandals and crises, both locally and at Westminster, trust in politics is at an all-time low. Too many politicians seem to be driven by self-interest rather than by public service and working for you. Alliance is committed to transparency and integrity in politics.

Here in Northern Ireland, there has been some tremendous progress over the past few years. Particularly on the back of the Hillsborough Agreement, there is a fresh start for the devolved institutions and a new opportunity for partnership working.

But the divisions in our society continue to bring huge costs. Our economy remains under-developed. Chaos in our education system must be overcome. Our health and transport systems need significant new investment.

Alliance provides a clear alternative to the divisive politics of unionism and nationalism. Only Alliance represents the whole community and advocates the common good for all.

Alliance has already delivered on the devolution of justice, progress on community relations, and the start of talks on resolving deadlock on education.

With your support, we can deliver much more. We will build a shared and reconciled society, not a divided one. We will modernise our local economy. We will sustain our local public services. We will tackle the human and financial costs of division.

The issue of the border is not at stake in this election, but the quality of life for you and your family, and the future of our society are all on the table.

The election is your chance to invest in positive politics, constructive politics, politics that works for you.



David Ford

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Ford".

Alliance is Northern Ireland's cross-community and anti-sectarian party, working on behalf of all the citizens in our community, irrespective of religion, class, physical or mental ability, race, gender or sexual orientation.

Sharing over Separation

Alliance is deeply committed to the creation of a shared future, based on a normal, civic society, and a united community. Continued deep divisions carry huge economic, financial and social costs. The Alliance vision is of a society where everyone can live and learn, work and socialise together in safety.

Freedom and Opportunity

Alliance respects every person as an individual, with their own talents, ambitions and identity. Society wins overall when everyone is given the freedom and the opportunity to develop to their full potential. Alliance is committed to tackling and removing the barriers to an opportunity society.

A Modern, Dynamic Economy

Alliance is committed to rebalancing Northern Ireland's current economy away from its heavy dependency on the public sector and low productivity industries towards a new, dynamic, and high-growth economy. The overall UK economy needs to be rebalanced, with regions such as Northern Ireland afforded greater opportunities.

Environmental Sustainability

Alliance recognises the reality of climate change and the scale of the threat both locally and globally. Addressing climate change and opening new economic opportunities can be achieved through investment in a Green New Deal building upon our natural advantages.

Creative Society

Alliance supports the fulfilment of everyone's potential, whether it lies in business, science and technology, the arts or in sport. Creative societies tend to be wealthier. Open and mixed societies that cherish and respect diversity are better at attracting and retaining talent.

Social Justice

Alliance campaigns for a fair form of taxation that is based both on ability to pay, enhances our regional competitiveness, sustains quality public services, and provides a safety net for all. We have a shared responsibility to look after the most vulnerable in our society.

Government that Works

Alliance advocates a different approach to governance in Northern Ireland based on the sharing of power rather than the carving up of power. Partnership and co-operation for the common good can be better incentivised. Nationally, Alliance is committed to the reform of Parliament, a fully written Constitution, and the enhancement of human rights protections.

Safer Communities and Justice for All

Alliance is committed to the impartial delivery of the rule of law. We will work for a justice system that avoids undue delay, provides integrity in sentencing, caters to the needs of victims and witnesses, rehabilitates offenders, and prevents crime and anti-social behaviour occurring in the first instance.

Best Value Public Services

Alliance will fight to protect Northern Ireland's Block Grant. This is not an excuse to protect the status quo, but rather to give the space for reform. We need to invest in better education, healthcare, and transport in order to become a more competitive economy. We emphasise prevention and early intervention to problems to provide cost-effective solutions.

Global Responsibility

As a liberal internationalist party, Alliance is committed to advancing peace and security through the promotion of democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. We are committed to tackling poverty, underdevelopment and climate change through international co-operation, increased aid, free and fair trade, and a comprehensive climate treaty.

Key Policy Commitments for Westminster

Economy

- Opposing steep cuts in UK public spending, including seeking to exempt Northern Ireland from cuts as far as possible in return for local commitment to reform
- Lobbying for a lower rate of Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland, to facilitate a step change in economic growth
- Campaigning for the introduction of a UK Regional Policy
- Re-balancing the Northern Ireland economy away from an over-reliance on the public sector
- Introducing a Green New Deal

Finance & Public Services

- Addressing the £1bn annual costs of managing a divided society
- Pushing a reform agenda for public services
- Supporting a levy on Bank profits

Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion

- Delivering a fair deal for pensioners, including restoration of the pensions link to earnings
- Supporting more flexible parental leave
- Campaigning for a standard minimum wage from age 16 upwards

Sustainable Development

- Supporting robust action against climate change
- Encouraging sustainable development at all levels of government
- Campaigning for a revised UK aviation strategy

Shared Society

- Continuing to deliver on Shared Future
- Working a Single Equality Act
- Supporting a realistic Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, with cross-community support
- Working for an open, fair and effective system of immigration

Justice

- Delivering an effective local criminal justice system that provides community safety and accessible justice
- Supporting a comprehensive approach to dealing with the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland
- Taking a civil liberties approach to national security

Good Governance

- Campaigning for changes in the Assembly Voting System
- Supporting a negotiated power-sharing coalition
- Endorsing votes at 16
- Calling for a UK written Constitution
- Advocating electoral reform with the introduction of Single Transferable Vote to Westminster
- Considering recall system for MPs in breach of their obligations

European and Global Affairs

- Working for positive engagement with the European Union
- Providing peace and security through a global system that supports democracy, human rights and the rule of law
- Campaigning for international development, including free and fair trade, increased international aid, and a new climate change treaty
- Endorsing a Strategic Defence Review for the United Kingdom

Economy

Alliance favours a re-balanced economy, in which a primacy of market solutions is balanced by both government and public concern for social justice.

The role of government, especially with the onset of a knowledge-driven economy, should be to create the right incentives and conditions to encourage a dynamic and high-growth, sustainable, economy.

Northern Ireland must build an economy responsive and resilient to changes in the global economy and technology, new environmental pressures and population changes. A successful economy and sustained prosperity are essential components to creating the favourable conditions for the development of a shared, non-sectarian society, giving people a stake in the consolidation of peace.

The economy is the critical issue in this election. The United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, is only now beginning to emerge from the deepest recession for decades.

While some contributory causes to the recession were international, others were domestic in nature, including a disproportionate dependency on banks and financial services, inadequate regulation of those sectors, and a housing bubble.

The UK economy is significantly unbalanced. Only three out of twelve UK regions are net contributors to the Treasury, namely Greater London, South-East England, and East of England. The other nine regions are all in various states of dependency with Northern Ireland at the extreme end of the spectrum, having almost 40% of public spending covered by a net financial transfer from the rest of the UK.

The economies of other competitive states in Europe and elsewhere are far less unbalanced. This situation is unsustainable in that it skews the housing market, places undue pressure on public services, distorts the labour market and creates unnecessary traffic congestion.

In Northern Ireland, the economy is further unbalanced in a number of ways. Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of productivity in the UK, a figure which has been stuck stubbornly at around 80% of the UK average over the past two decades. Northern Ireland has the highest dependency on the public sector of any region in the UK, with it constituting almost 70% of the local economy, a very high figure by international standards. We still have a high level of unemployment and the highest level of economic inactivity in the UK with almost 30% of adults outside of the labour market.

There are two central challenges for both the national government and also for the devolved Executive.

The first is to mitigate the effects of the recession on demand and employment, and to ensure a speedy recovery. To this end, Alliance welcomed the fiscal stimulus of the UK Government, the adoption of necessary steps to stabilise the banking and financial services sector, and the interest rate reductions and quantitative easing from the Bank of England.

That said Alliance has concerns over the scale, nature and time duration of the fiscal stimulus with comparable packages in other jurisdictions. Over half of the UK stimulus was taken up by an economically dubious temporary reduction in the level of VAT.

The second challenge is to rebalance and restructure the economy to ensure that the UK emerges from the recession in a stronger, more competitive shape. The nature of the approach to the first challenge could have a major impact in determining outcomes with respect to the second challenge.

In Northern Ireland the Executive has had the opportunity to engage in its own fiscal stimulus, but has squandered the opportunity. Primacy was given to populist measures that at best had an impact on levels of demand. This was the opportunity cost of rebalancing local economy, through, for example, a Green New Deal.

UK Public Spending

The Government has had to increase public spending over the past 18 months to cushion the country from the worst of the recession. In the future the resultant high levels of public debt cannot be sustained in a competitive economy. The key challenge is make the right call over how quickly that debt is paid off and how best to balance that repayment through spending cuts and tax rises.

Alliance is wary of proposals from some that would see this debt reduced at too steep a rate, with significant cuts in public spending. It is notable that the UK Government alone among major economies has stopped its own stimulus. Now, there is pressure for some quarters for it to pay off its national debt too rapidly. Alliance rejects the notion that a further £6 billion can be removed from UK public spending during this financial year.

This poses the risk that the impact of such cuts on employment levels, and consequently consumer demand would throw the United Kingdom back into recession.

Given Northern Ireland's current high dependency upon the public sector, the danger is particularly acute for this region. It is possible that Northern Ireland could be in recession while the rest of the UK is beginning to grow again.

Alliance MPs will work to resist reckless and rapid cuts in public spending by a future UK Government.

Alliance will seek to exempt Northern Ireland as far as possible from spending cuts to the Block Grant. We will use arguments regarding the particular risks to the Northern Ireland economy and the need for time to address distortions to public spending caused by the costs of division and to introduce reforms to public services. This issues is dealt with in more detail in our section on Finance and Public Services.

Rebalancing Our Economy

A growing economy is vital to driving up living standards, to creating the opportunity to build a fairer society and reducing dependency on the UK Treasury. It is essential that we deliver on a sustainable economic future in the medium to long term. We need to promote policies to facilitate a significant increase in economic growth, increased home grown investment and a greater level of export activity. The access to the tools and resources in order to rebalance our economy is essential.

Alliance will actively challenge the current lack of a UK-wide regional policy. More economic activity, in particular high productivity enterprises need to be encouraged in what are currently the dependent regions.

Alliance supports the call for a differential rate of Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland, ideally at 12.5%. This campaign is currently led by the Economic Reform Group. Economists argue that lowering the current rate of 28% for large companies and 21% for small companies would best and most quickly facilitate a step change in the local economy. Through attracting and incentivising local high value added companies to Northern Ireland, the productivity gap with the rest of the UK would be closed and there would be an increase in export-orientated growth. A particular argument for a lower rate of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland is the distortions to competition for investment on the island of Ireland, given the 12.5% rate in the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Government sought to protect this despite having to take other tough measures to fix their public finances. Alliance accepts that lost revenue in the short term from a lower rate of taxation would have to be met from the Northern Ireland Block Grant under the terms of the Azores ruling of the European Court of Justice. This is estimated at around £200m.

Alliance will seek to reduce needless regulations and bureaucracy for small businesses. Obstacles that unnecessarily impede growth must be minimised.

However, recent evidence has confirmed the need for tighter regulation in some areas such as the banking and financial services sectors.

Alliance would support legislation to separate retail banking from investment banking.

Skills

We must ensure that education and training produces the new skills required by employers in an increasingly globalised and competitive market. Economic and education policy needs to be better integrated, including encouraging more students to specialise in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and business skills. Those who are economically inactive or barred from employment through artificial barriers (for example senior citizens) need to be encouraged back into the job market.

Innovation

Investment in research and development has progressed in Northern Ireland in recent years, but it is still at one of the lowest levels of all regions within the United Kingdom. More research needs to be funded through our universities, and incentivised within the private sector.

Enterprise

Northern Ireland requires a stronger entrepreneurial culture. We have one of the lowest levels of business start-ups, as illustrated by VAT registrations, of all UK regions. The playing field is tilted in favour of the professions and the public sector and often against business. Business needs to be better promoted within careers education and business failure should not be stigmatised. Invest NI should become more focused on business start-ups. The local economic profile that is dominated by small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) is not necessarily an asset, and SMEs should be encouraged to grow and also have the necessary access to finance.

Infrastructure

Alliance recognises the increased levels of capital investment from the Northern Ireland Executive over the past three years. This needs to be continued into the future, with particular sectors for investment including the public transport sector and information technology. Construction work is a particular source of job creation and maintenance.

Targeting Sectors

Alliance is cautious regarding the identification of particular sectors for growth rather than simply leaving this to the market. However, there should be scope to encourage the enhanced development of particular clusters of economic activity, including seeking international partnership and business opportunities to strengthen indigenous growth sectors of growth. A number of sectors may have particular growth potential. These include medical technology, pharmaceuticals and the agri-food industry. Northern Ireland is well placed to capitalise on its English-speaking identity and geographical location between North America and East Asia as a financial services and communication hub. Alliance also sees the opportunity to significantly develop tourism which forms a considerably smaller proportion of the local economy than in neighbouring jurisdictions. We also see particular opportunities within the green economy.

A Green New Deal for Northern Ireland

Alliance advocates a Green New Deal for Northern Ireland to ensure that Northern Ireland rebalances and modernises its economy, to help Northern Ireland prepare for the challenges of climate change, and to ensure, in the short term, Northern Ireland comes firmly out of recession.

Alliance sees potential for new forms of economic growth and employment from the green revolution. Protecting the environment and developing our economy are not mutually exclusive but interdependent. Sustainable development is the bedrock of the future success of Northern Ireland society. With the development of a strategic approach, Northern Ireland is well placed to take advantage of the potential of both wind and tidal energy. In a region rich in renewable resources, government policy must emphasise and encourage new, imaginative sources of energy. Energy technology should be supported by government funding as well as by the private sector.

Energy costs are the single biggest competitive disadvantage for local businesses, and for domestic consumers alike. In Northern Ireland, we are over reliant on imported fossil fuels for our energy needs. Accordingly, Northern Ireland is overly exposed to the risks of energy insecurity.

Alliance supports the increased availability of energy sources that will offer consumers a greater choice and should lead to increased competitiveness in retail energy markets.

We support and encourage action to decarbonise our energy supply through renewable sources. The Strategic Energy Framework should be formally adopted. This will help to achieve the medium-term target of 40% of Northern Ireland's electricity to be generated from indigenous renewable sources.

To date, many other jurisdictions have engaged in Green New Deals, often as part of their response to the global economic downturn. Alliance advocates the following elements as part of a Northern Ireland Green New Deal:

- **Energy efficiency in homes and businesses**

This involves incentives and regulations to encourage the installation of such measures, including 'smart meters' and home insulation. Incentives can be created through the tax and rating system. Regulations can be imposed through planning and building regulations. This element of the Green New Deal would be the most effective in reducing costs, as it involves a short lead-in time, and would be labour intensive in terms of job creation.

- **Further Development of Renewable Energy**

The provision and sources of small and large-scale renewable heat, light and power and also heat needs to be extended. We have obvious opportunities in terms of on-shore and off-shore wind. However, the range of different technologies needs to be encouraged. The system of Renewable Obligation Certificates requires a fundamental review to ensure it is fit for purpose, with consideration of Feed-in Tariffs. Resources need to be set aside for capital grants for both macro- and micro- schemes. Changes to planning policy and practice are required to make renewable schemes easier to establish. There are concerns with the current Policy Planning Statement 18 and its Supplementary Guidance.

- **Improving the Energy Network – Smarter Grid**

The locations and nature of power generation may not necessarily match the areas and timing of peak demand. Investment is therefore required in the electricity grid. Alliance advocates further development of the single energy market on the island of Ireland and further north-south interconnectors. We also support the proposed EU-wide renewable energy super-grid.

- **Greater investment in public transport**

There has been an historic underinvestment in transport in Northern Ireland. The current balance of investment is too heavily weighed against public transport, and is the opposite of the trend and balance elsewhere in Western Europe. Existing transport patterns are a major feature in Northern Ireland with the largest carbon footprint of all regions within the United Kingdom. Alliance would reprioritise the balance of funding within the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland in favour of investment in public transport.

Alliance calls for the creation of a Green Economy Task Force.

This body could be sponsored by the Northern Ireland Executive and include representatives from the business community. It would drive Northern Ireland’s adaptation to meet these new opportunities.

Other Commitments

Alliance will vote to repeal the Digital Economy Act and replace it with better legislation. The issues raised by the Act must be addressed, but the legislation passed in parliament is deeply flawed. The Act has far reaching implications for fair internet access, privacy rights on the internet and the future of analogue broadcasting. These need detailed discussion in parliamentary committee and with the general public. It was inappropriate to force such a complex piece of legislation through in the last minute ‘wash-up’ process without proper debate.

Alliance is also committed to investing in the development of the social economy within Northern Ireland. We would support the creation of a Social Enterprise Equity Fund for start-up and growing social enterprises. Social enterprises should also be better able to access public procurement contracts. We would also seek to ensure that regulation and audit requirements are reasonable and proportionate.

Finance & Public Services

Alliance respects the autonomy of individuals to spend, invest or save their income as they see fit within the law. However, it is necessary for the government to raise revenue to ensure that public services are properly resourced and sustainable. Furthermore, the judicious use of financial powers can have a beneficial role in incentivising and influencing individual and business economic and social behaviour. Alliance campaigns for a fair form of taxation that is based both on ability to pay whilst tackling negative features of society such as pollution.

Alliance has already set out the tough context for public spending in our economy section above. In this section, we illustrate how we would seek to respond to the challenge both at the UK level as a whole and also with respect to Northern Ireland.

UK Public Finances

Alliance MPs would seek to influence the decisions taken by a future government on taxation and spending. Alliance accepts that the current level of public debt needs to be addressed in the medium-term future. The timing and rate of reductions are a matter for debate. Alliance notes that the International Monetary Fund and independent economists have cautioned against the UK paying off its debt too quickly, with the risk of jeopardising the level of economic recovery or tipping the country back into recession.

Reduction of the national debt will involve some increases in taxation and reductions in the level of public spending. Alliance will seek to ensure that changes to the taxation system are fair and progressive, and that reductions in public spending will not undermine public services.

Alliance will oppose Conservative and Unionist proposals to raise the threshold for inheritance tax. We are also opposed to their proposals for a discriminatory and tokenistic marriage tax allowance.

Alliance will support a levy on the profits of banks. The banking sector was bailed out through taxpayer support. It is only right that the banks are now asked to support efforts to restore the public finance and rebalance the economy. Alliance also supports the levy on bonuses to bankers.

Reductions in spending cannot be found purely from addressing waste and administrative costs within the public sector. This is not a 'bottomless pit' of potential savings. In reality, some tough decisions will have to be taken in relation to whether or not to proceed with certain programmes. Choices will have to be made regarding priorities.

An illustration of some programmes which Alliance would be sceptical towards, include the like-for-like replacement of Trident and ID cards.

Northern Ireland's Public Finances

Alliance will fight to protect Northern Ireland's Block Grant. This is not an excuse to protect the status quo, but rather to give the space for reform. We need to invest in better education, healthcare, and transport in order to become a more competitive economy. We would emphasise prevention and early intervention to provide cost-effective solutions. Northern Ireland's case would be helped by 'putting its own house in order'.

There are a number of differences within the profile of public spending in Northern Ireland compared to other regions. This applies to both between and within budgetary areas. Some of these may be justifiable given the particular geographic or demographic circumstances of this region. Others are less easily rationalised, and urgently need to be addressed.

Costs of Division

Alliance has regularly emphasised that the financial costs of division being in the region of £1bn each year. This figure has been validated by the Deloitte Report (2007) which indeed placed an upper estimate of this at potentially £1.5bn per annum. This costs every household more than £1,000 per year.

The costs of a divided society are apparent in four respects.

First, there are the direct costs of policing riots, other civil disturbances and parades, the distortions to policing that arise from the security threat, and the costs to a wide range of agencies in repairing damaged buildings and facilities. These costs have hitherto fallen to the UK Exchequer, but they now are part of the Northern Ireland Block Grant with the devolution of policing and justice.

Second, there are the indirect costs of providing duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community, either implicitly or explicitly. This includes: schools, GP surgeries, job centres, community centres, leisure centres, and even bus stops. These costs are borne not just by the public sector, but by the private sector too.

Third, related to the second aspect, there are hidden factors, linked to divisions, which impact upon the cost environment that Departments and agencies have to respond to.

Fourth, there are the opportunity costs of lost inward investment and tourism. While the Northern Ireland economy has performed better in recent years, it is still performing well below its potential capacity.

The NI Executive and Assembly should acknowledge the financial and other cost implications of divisions in Northern Ireland, and commit themselves to addressing such matters both within the current 2008-2011 comprehensive spending review and in particular future policy and spending frameworks. Resources cannot be released all at once. Indeed some short-term investments in shared alternatives may be required in order to release funds. Nevertheless it is critical that we make a start. Resources would be better invested in improving public services for all and in investing in economic improvement. For further detail visit: www.allianceparty.org/pages/costs-of-division.html

‘NO’ to Cheap Populism

It will be difficult for Northern Ireland to argue its case with the Treasury for some exemption from spending cuts if the Northern Ireland Executive is not acting responsibly with its resources. Alliance has criticised the Executive for engaging in a number of populist measures that reduce the opportunity for investment into public services while neither helping businesses nor households effectively nor rebalancing our economy.

Alliance has been straight with the people of Northern Ireland in recognising that the continued deferral of domestic water charges is not financially sustainable. It currently creates a cost pressure of £200m per year, which is not met from the Block Grant. In our 2007 Assembly Manifesto, we emphasised that we wanted to avoid a situation where an additional, unfair tap tax was introduced. However, we said that if charges had to be considered, they should be transparent, and be based on usage and ability to pay. Water charges based on the value of property do not reflect different levels of household income. They also fail to reflect usage of water or encourage conservation.

Reforming Public Services

Any rationale for a full or partial exemption of Northern Ireland from cuts is the opportunity to reform local public services and to more readily focus resources upon the delivery of front-line services.

Efficiencies should really be about making services work more productively and effectively. They are not about simply doing less or about increasing charges for services.

In seeking to take forward reform and to better manage costs, common themes for the Alliance Party approach include: prevention, that is seeking to stop problems emerging at all or on the same scale as today; early intervention, that is acting as quickly as possible avoiding more costly requirements later; and better joined-up government, that is working to find collaborative solutions that produce better results. At present, through the Assembly, Alliance is promoting reform in a number of key areas.

Health

Alliance is committed to a National Health Service that is free to all at the point of entry. While health spending in Northern Ireland per head is the highest in the UK, this reflects our much higher health needs as a society. That said, the rate of growth in health spending has been flat-lining in recent years. Changing demographics, including an ageing population, the cost of new drugs and treatments for conditions such as cancer, and the need to rebalance the profile of spending to meet needs such as mental health, are all pressing challenges.

Alliance stresses the importance of investment in public health and prevention. In particular bearing in mind that the incidence of mental health problems is much higher in Northern Ireland than the UK-average, we are committed to the full implementation of the recommendations of the Bamford Review. There are particular gaps in provision of mental health services at present in Northern Ireland, including lack of access to psychological therapies. We would address the structural underfunding of mental health services, particularly with respect to children and young people.

Alliance is further conscious of the inadequate system of social care of our senior citizens in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. We have a longstanding commitment to free personal care. It is wrong that people are forced into selling their homes to fund their care. Alliance would also welcome a UK-wide Commission to study this issue.

Education

Alliance regards education as a key investment for society as a whole and for allowing every person to develop to their full potential. Resources need to be directed efficiently into servicing pupils and assisting teachers.

Alliance accepts the need for the rationalisation of the school estate due to falling enrolments and approximately 50,000 empty places. We endorse efforts to promote collaboration between schools through Area Planning, and we support a sustainable schools policy that encourages rationalisation across sectors.

Alliance supports shared education. While Alliance continues to advocate integrated education as the preferred model, we recognise that there will continue to be a number of different sectors within the Northern Ireland education system for the foreseeable future and that there can be a number of different models of sharing between sectors that are all of considerable value.

There is considerable evidence of support for integrated education. Alliance would give every parent the capacity to choose an integrated place for their child.

Integrated education should be considered as the most economically and financially sustainable form of education, as well as delivering educationally and socially. Integrated education is not a threat to an already overstretched system, but rather as part of the solution.

Alliance is also committed to increasing the number and accessibility of nursery places in Northern Ireland.

Training and Employment

Investment in skilling the workforce can be the single most effective means for making our economy more competitive.

Alliance recognises the key role played by both Colleges of Further Education and our local Universities. Funding should be protected as far as possible for such institutions, with a particular emphasis on facilitating support for STEM subjects, namely Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. Such investments will complement the wider economic policy recommended by the Alliance Party. Alliance is committed in principle to abolishing tuition fees for Northern Ireland students, as in Scotland, at the earliest opportunity.

A further challenge is the high number of economically inactive persons in Northern Ireland. At almost 30%, this is the highest level of any region within the United Kingdom. A particular challenge lies with young people outside the system, the so-called NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This is a significant loss to our economy, as is long-term sickness.

Other Commitments

Alliance will work to ensure that any needs-based successor formula for handling UK regional spending reflects the needs and subtleties of the situation in Northern Ireland. The Barnett Formula deals with the distribution of any changes in relevant expenditure at a UK-level, and is based on population. It alters the size of the Block Grant available to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In the past, Northern Ireland has seen increases in this Block Grant in line with increased spending across the UK as a whole. In the near future, spending reductions across the UK will likely see cuts to the Block Grant. The Barnett Formula has in practice served Northern Ireland well over the past thirty years, though it is theoretically set over time to erode the uplift that Northern Ireland has historically achieved due to its higher level of need. There are political pressures for the replacement of this system with a needs-based assessment, which could be very subjective.

Alliance recognises and respects that devolution allows the Northern Ireland Assembly to take its own decisions on spending priorities. However, when additional resources do become available for Northern Ireland due to increased spending at the UK level through so-called 'Barnett consequentials', Alliance believes that there is a need for greater transparency around how such monies are used in Northern Ireland, including proper consideration of whether Northern Ireland should follow suit with its own similar scheme when the rest of the UK makes new investments.

Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion

Social Security, employment support and pension policy is notionally devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, since the 1940s, there has been observance of the 'parity principle.' Transfer payments come to the Northern Ireland Executive as Annually Managed Expenditure and are not regarded as money that local politicians can spend as they wish. This allows the level of benefit payments to be equal throughout the United Kingdom. Given the much smaller tax base in Northern Ireland together with higher poverty and unemployment, this arrangement is very much to our advantage. Any local decisions to vary this would be reckless. Changes in policy and benefit levels are best considered at a UK-wide level through Westminster.

Measures for Northern Ireland

Within Northern Ireland, Alliance is campaigning for a number of measures. These include:

- A review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy to ensure that Government is delivering for the vulnerable such as the elderly and the young, those suffering from illness and those with disabilities;
- The provision of improved access to quality social and long-term care to maintain dignity in advanced years;
- An end to unfair discrimination when it adversely affects the opportunities, goods and services available to older people;
- Examination of the most effective and sustainable way to introduce free personal care for those in residential and nursing homes and how best to support families when a loved one needs residential care;
- Ensuring that carers have access to the appropriate support facilities, and are entitled to flexible working hours;
- Advocating a comprehensive review of childcare provision to ensure that sufficient support is in place to allow those who wish to progress their careers or education can do so without disadvantaging their family lives;
- Simplifying the benefits application system the complexity of which has proved a difficulty for those who lost their jobs during the economic downturn, and continues to confuse those most vulnerable in society who are yet to access their full entitlements such as pension credit;

- Ensuring that those who are abusing the system are dealt with through the courts and resources released reinvested in those who are genuinely in need;
- Providing sufficient funding and support for advice services which have proved invaluable to thousands of people dealing with debt and benefit issues and which are stretched in their capacity to deliver the service that is requested of them by the public;
- Supporting initiatives that would allow women who take a career break due to family commitments to continue their professional education at home and also support their re-entry back into their employment when they return to work;
- Addressing the under-funding in support for children's and young people's services relative to the rest of the United Kingdom. This includes support for the voluntary and community sector. Alliance supports the Office of the NI Children's Commissioner in their work to advance children's rights in Northern Ireland.

Pushing for the reform of Adoption Legislation. Adoption is not about providing an individual or family with a child. It is about providing a child with the best possible chance at a better future. What matters significantly is the stability of the environment in which the child is being raised. This can be achieved in a number of settings.

Northern Ireland has over 100,000 children living in poverty. In a modern society, such a situation is hugely detrimental to the future prospects of those children and our society as a whole. Half of all children in poverty in Northern Ireland live in a family where one adult is in paid employment. Alliance advocates:

- Enhanced, affordable & accessible childcare and nursery services;
- Further development of Sure Start schemes in local areas and ensuring long-term funding; and
- Addressing the impact of poverty on educational opportunities and poor health.

UK-Wide Actions

With respect to the United Kingdom system as a whole, Alliance would support a number of measures.

Alliance would oppose Conservative and Unionist plans for a £3 a week marriage tax credit. The tax system is not the appropriate mechanism to promote so-called family values. Every family is different, and instead of creating rigid rules or special policies that help some families and not others, measures should be put in place that address poverty and lack of opportunities.

Alliance would support measures to allow parents more flexibility around maternity and paternity leave. This would enable mothers and fathers to determine the most effective balance to fit their own family and work circumstances.

Alliance will work towards the eradication of pensioner poverty. We would support increasing the basic state pension, paid alongside other existing entitlements, to provide some financial stability for all. We are committed to restoring the link between pensions and the higher of earnings or prices. We would also increase the winter fuel grant to reflect high energy prices and make energy efficiency in the properties of pensioners a priority. Alliance would also scrap the compulsory retirement age.

Alliance will fight to defend Carers Allowance and Attendance Allowance. Alliance recognises the huge contributions carers make to society. For if they did not carry out these tasks that often put a personal burden on the carer themselves, our society would be overwhelmed by demand. Carers deserve a better deal from government. Carers need to be better resourced, and eligibility criteria for financial support made simpler to understand. Support should be harmonised with other benefit entitlements. We would abolish the overlap between carers allowance and state pension.

Alliance will support the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). We favour measures to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in power structures and decision making.

Alliance calls for the incorporation into UK domestic law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Alliance will work to provide well resourced childcare provision. There are successful childcare voucher employer/employee tax incentive schemes that we will promote and implement with sufficient funding.

Alliance will support the introduction of a standard minimum wage from the age of 16. This reflects our commitment to fairness and non-discrimination.

Sustainable Development

At the start of the 21st Century many countries across the world are facing up to the global threat of unsustainable development. This has resulted in changing natural habitats, overexploitation of resources, increased pollution and climate change. If current trends continue, damage to our environment will accelerate. Action must be taken to ensure development is sustainable by considering the environmental and social impacts.

As highlighted by the Stern Review, the benefits of strong and early action far outweigh the economic costs of not acting. All sections of society, including the public and private sector, civic society and local communities, producers and consumers, have important roles to play.

While there may be a potential cost of 1% to Global GDP in terms of dealing with climate change today, the Stern Report draws a stark warning of potential costs of between 5% and 20% of Global GDP in the future if climate change is not adequately addressed from today.

But we should also acknowledge the potential for new sources for economic growth and for employment from rebalancing the economy to address the new environmental context. Again Stern anticipates that by 2050, worldwide markets for low-carbon technologies could be worth at least US\$500bn.

Alliance supports regional, national, European and international efforts to protect the environment. Alliance supports the implementation of the Rio and Kyoto Treaties. Although the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit “recognises” the scientific case for keeping temperature rises to no more than 2°C, there was no commitment to legally binding, timely emissions reductions to achieve that goal. We recognise that this is an important step in addressing the issue of climate change, but more urgent international response is required and must be a top priority.

Northern Ireland is a region with the highest carbon footprint in the UK. In *per capita* terms, Northern Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions figures are considerably higher than the UK average. Average emissions per person are 12.4 tonnes in Northern Ireland, which is higher than the UK average of 10.4 tonnes. It is clear that we are not only living beyond our means but also disadvantaging others outside our borders.

Alliance believes that a quality local and global environment is integral to a good quality of life. There is much that can be done to protect our local environment and to contribute to wider efforts to protect the environment generally. The UK Government's independent Climate Change Committee made recommendations for the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050, with attendant interim targets. Beyond the UK, the European Union has a further suite of targets to be delivered by 2020 – a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions, a 20% cut in energy consumption, and a 20% contribution to energy generation from renewable sources.

Action should be considered in five broad areas:

- Reducing demand for emission intensive goods, facilities and services;
- Increased efficiency in energy use in homes and businesses;
- Action on non-energy emissions;
- Tackling deforestation and replanting forest; and
- Switching to lower carbon technologies for power, heat and transport.

We have highlighted the new economic opportunities in Northern Ireland from a Green New Deal in our economy section. Alliance believes that the market can drive a certain degree of innovation and change, but recognises the rationale for state intervention and incentives for change through both the tax and regulatory systems. We endorse 'the polluter pays' principle, and also want to remove distorting, anti-environment subsidies.

The control of many aspects of our environment is devolved. In the Assembly, the Alliance Party has worked to protect the natural and built environment. We continue to:

- Campaign for an independent Environmental Protection Agency;
- Promote biodiversity;
- Lobby for a local Marine Bill to complement the UK-wide legislation; and
- Secure a local Forestry Bill to protect and further develop our woodland.

With respect to waste management, Alliance is promoting much greater use of recycling, and is encouraging the progressive use of public sector purchasing behaviour to stimulate markets.

Alliance favours balanced development that creates new investment, prosperity and homes, while respecting both the environment and our built heritage. Alliance is concerned at the lack of proper planning frameworks in most parts of Northern Ireland and the particular absence of current Area Plans. Alliance is also deeply concerned at the destruction of many buildings of historic importance or architectural merit and incursions into the Greenbelt, as well as threats to our beautiful coastline and countryside. We are seeking to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is put in place before new major housing developments commence. For example, sufficient consideration must be given to potential new residents' access to public transport. We also believe that out-of-town retail developments should only be permitted as part of an approved strategic plan. Finally, we would develop best practice regarding design of the urban environment to maximise sharing and integration.

Safe, effective and efficient transport is essential to the success of the economy, the protection of the local and global environment and the quality of life for the people in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that the current cost of congestion to the Northern Ireland economy is around £250m annually or 1.5% of total economic productivity. This figure is expected to grow with increased vehicle numbers and journeys. The transport sector has the largest impact on Northern Ireland's carbon footprint. Transport accounts approximately for 28% of Northern Ireland's Greenhouse Gas emissions. This has grown on average by 1.9% per annum since 1990 (37% increase between 1990 and 2007) which is a result of increasing demand for road transport which itself accounts for almost 80% of all transport emissions in Northern Ireland. There is an imbalance in funding within Northern Ireland's transport system between on the one hand road and on the other hand rail and other forms of public transport compared to the rest of the UK never mind most of Europe.

Decisions taken in Westminster will affect the whole UK, including Northern Ireland, and contribute to addressing global problems which can and will affect us all.

Alliance will work for Sustainable Development at all levels of government. Protecting the environment and developing our economy are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent. This is reflected in the concept of sustainable development, as it recognises the links between economic, social and environmental concerns. It is about balancing all of these needs.

Alliance endorses the ‘polluter pays’ principle. This means that those who pollute more should pay more and provides a financial incentive to pollute less. We support a shift in taxation towards pollution and resource depletion. Consistent with the ‘polluter pays’ principle, the use of market forces can contribute to the protection of the environment.

Alliance will seek early further reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to give local fishermen and other stakeholders a real say in the management of their own regional waters.

Alliance will lobby for the abolition of VAT on all renovations and repairs to existing buildings. This will protect our cultural heritage for future generations, through encouraging the re-use of existing buildings.

Alliance will encourage a wider debate on ‘congestion charges’ and other forms of road pricing. This should be used to further environmental protection and internalise externalities to heavy polluters. This would be consistent with the ‘polluter pays’ principle. Any funds generated from these measures should be redirected into worthy projects, innovation, research and development. However, we need a proper public transport infrastructure before this could happen.

Alliance will lobby for a revised Aviation Strategy for the United Kingdom. Aviation policy is not currently devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The current strategy is now almost a decade old. There are particular challenges as to how economic and environmental considerations are balanced with respect to the development of airports within Northern Ireland.

Shared Society

Building a Shared Future in Northern Ireland

Alliance has a vision of a cohesive, shared and integrated society, where people are safe and prosperous, have ample opportunities, and are treated fairly and with respect. We want to deliver a normal, civic society underpinned by our shared values of equality, respect for diversity and interdependence.

Alliance rejects the notion of parallel societies, with so-called ‘separate, but equal’ provision. An apartheid Northern Ireland cannot work and must be resisted.

Despite the political progress of recent years, sectarian and racist attitudes, in addition to deeply ingrained patterns of segregation and inequality, remain major problems within our society. They carry considerable social, economic and financial costs and consequences.

Often territory and public space are marked out through the use of exclusive communal symbols. While separation is generally not the formal policy of the state, there is substantial duplication in the provision of goods, facilities and services by both the public and private sectors. More ‘peace walls’, built to keep people apart, have been erected since the 1994 cease-fires than before.

However, Alliance recognises many positive trends upon which we must build. Significant elements of civil society are organized on a cross-community basis. The workplace, largely through top-down regulation, is integrated. There is evidence of substantial public support for shared education, housing and leisure pursuits. But this aspiration for shared provision is often frustrated, sometimes owing to lack of facilities, but mainly owing to fears over security, both physical and cultural. In terms of identity, more and more people are casting off traditional labels and challenging the notions that Protestant = British = Unionist or Catholic = Irish = Nationalist. New immigrants continue to come to Northern Ireland to seek work and to contribute to the local economy - an encouraging sign of increasing globalisation. Nevertheless, their presence poses a further challenge to traditional conceptions of identity.

There is a clear relationship between good relations and equality. An unequal society cannot be a shared society, and a shared society cannot be delivered without equality. Our political institutions are built and depend upon the foundation stones of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and community cohesion. Policies on equality and good relations should be applied to reinforce one another. Equality arguments should not be used to undermine good relations and good relations arguments should not be made to undermine equality.

Alliance is committed to the creation of a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. We welcome the progress that is now being made, thanks to our pressure, towards such a policy. Alliance will critically review the detail of the forthcoming draft strategy that is now emerging due to our lobbying.

Core Themes for Action

Alliance believes that core areas for action include:

- Screening all government policies for their impact on Good Relations;
- Mainstreaming community relations issues throughout the work of government and civil society;
- Addressing the costs of division through removing unnecessary duplication of resources and promoting shared services;
- Respecting all forms of individual and collective identity;
- Supporting shared cultural expressions;
- Challenging stereo-types and prejudice;
- Supporting the right to live and learn, work and play free from harassment, intimidation or threat of any kind;
- Protecting, maintaining and developing of shared space, which is open to all people and cultures, including tackling visible manifestations of sectarianism and racism, such as the inappropriate use of flags and other threats to shared space;
- Development and resourcing of an active strategy to engage with communities to commence and support a process to gradually remove so-called 'peace-walls' and supporting wider work in and around interfaces to create a better sense of security through sharing;
- Creation of rapid crisis intervention programmes to tackle emerging 'hot spots' of sectarianism or racism;
- Greater integration of shared future considerations into planning and urban regeneration;

- Promotion of shared education, including integrated education;
- Development of open, mixed and integrated housing, which is freely available to all;
- Supporting mixed workplaces;
- Tackling impediments to labour market mobility; and
- Supporting and funding of a regional community relations body.

Community Cohesion across the United Kingdom

A major issue facing Northern Ireland is how to promote a shared and cohesive society and to preserve shared space (not necessarily neutral space) and the access of every person to it with respect for the rights of individuals and groups of individuals to celebrate cultural and other identities within our increasingly diverse society. This debate must be informed by human rights considerations.

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

Equality

Alliance will promote equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, equality of access, and equality under the law for all people, irrespective of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief, race and ethnicity; and political opinion. Alliance believes equality legislation, in particular the monitoring of outcomes, should properly reflect and respect the diversity of identities.

Equality policy is now primarily devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. While devolution creates a powerful regional dimension to policy-making, this should primarily relate to decisions regarding the allocation of resources to fit particular economic and social circumstances rather than creating special rights regimes. Alliance believes that there should be the same standard equality provisions throughout the United Kingdom.

Equality provisions are devolved from Westminster to Northern Ireland. The potential benefits of Northern Ireland being more progressive in rights protections need to be balanced by the risk that Northern Ireland is left with a more regressive equality regime.

Alliance supports the creation of a Single Equality Act for Northern Ireland. With the failure to date of the Executive and Assembly to pass such legislation, Northern Ireland has lost the opportunity to set a powerful example within these islands. Indeed, with the passage by Parliament of the recent Equality Act 2010, covering England and Wales, Northern Ireland has now fallen behind.

Alliance MPs will continue to support the progressive development of equality legislation.

Alliance also supports the full implementation of the Racial Equality Strategy.

A Northern Ireland Bill of Rights

Alliance has a longstanding commitment to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. It is for Westminster to legislate for such a Bill under law, but with the cross-community support of the Assembly.

As liberals, we recognise that human rights are inherent and universal. There is scope for different jurisdictions to recognise different rights in domestic law, provided of course that no inappropriate inequalities are thereby created. Rights are important to protect individuals and minorities against the state and others. They are a cornerstone of democracy. Any dialogue around rights cannot be separated from responsibilities. Those claiming rights cannot do so without some consideration for the maintenance of the framework of a democratic society based on the rule of law that provides for the exercise of rights.

Alliance recognises the central importance of the European Convention on Human Rights. However, we also recognise that it is deficient in many respects, including socio-economic rights, rights for persons belonging to communities and minorities and on areas relating to managing a divided society.

While Alliance is itself open to a strong Bill of Rights, we believe that significant intellectual and political hurdles must be overcome to provide compelling arguments as to why Northern Ireland requires a fundamentally different human rights regime than other, especially neighbouring, jurisdictions.

For Alliance any Northern Ireland Bill of Rights must be:

- Realistic, and capable of being enforced through our own courts;
- Consistent with European and international standards; and

- Flexible, to take account of changing circumstances and an evolving Northern Ireland; and
- Furthermore, it must avoid entrenching any particular view of identity, such as the notion of two separate communities in Northern Ireland, and accordingly sectarian divisions.

A United Kingdom Bill of Rights

While Northern Ireland is a distinct society in many respects, it does not and should not exist in a self-contained bubble. It is part of a wider UK, all-island, European and international context. In a globalised and interdependent world, individuals are interacting much more across frontiers. Human rights protections must recognise this.

Alliance is conscious of talk of a wider UK Bill of Rights from a number of parties even if they do so with different emphases and meanings.

It was originally envisaged that any Northern Ireland Bill of Rights would be created in the context of a common platform across the UK provided of the European Convention on Human Rights, but no wider UK Bill of Rights. Any process to formulate a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland today has to relate to any potential UK Bill of Rights. This could still entail a separate Northern Ireland Bill of Rights or a chapter within a larger document provided that the subtleties of the situation in Northern Ireland are respected. The bottom line for Alliance is no regression on the Human Rights Act with respect to either a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights or the development of a UK Bill of Rights from ‘first principles’.

Immigration Issues

Like many other places around the world, both Britain and Ireland have historically been shaped by migration. Alliance welcomes the opportunities, but also the challenges, arising from immigration into the United Kingdom and to Northern Ireland.

Diversity is to be welcomed in our societies. Our ability to attract talent from overseas and to retain our own indigenous talent is encouraging. It is a sign of economic vitality and opportunity. It is a reversal of the historic trend whereby Ireland exported its people to other parts of the British Isles and to North America and Australia.

Alliance recognises that immigration must be regulated in order to be fair, but is opposed to a mindset of ‘pulling up the drawbridge’ and shutting the UK off from a globalising world. There is a need for accurate assessment of net migration, in order to best understand what is happening and to plan services. There is a need for formal exit controls to capture numbers leaving in order to complement information on those who have arrived.

Alliance would change the rules to make it easier to get a work permit for those who are willing to go and live in a part of the United Kingdom that is short of workers. This would encourage newcomers to live where they are needed.

Legal Immigration

Alliance supports a points-based system, linked to skills, as the least worst of all the alternatives for regulating legal immigration. We are opposed to an arbitrary cap that has been proposed by some, such as the Conservative and Unionists.

There is a need for a stronger safety net for immigrants when they lose employment.

Alliance is keen to attract students to study in UK Further and Higher Education Colleges. However, there is a need for stronger checks to ensure that this avenue is not abused.

Asylum

Alliance believes that the UK should continue to provide safe haven for those fleeing torture, war and oppression. Yet nearly a quarter of all asylum decisions are overturned on appeal. With a backlog of half a million cases, long delays and the inability to be able to work leaves many asylum seekers destitute and forced to rely on handouts. This paints a negative picture in the minds of the public. There are some nominal allies of the United Kingdom where individuals can be subject to gross human rights abuses, either directly under the state or from civil society in the absence of proper enforcement of the rule of law by states. The need for asylum in such circumstances should be recognised.

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work (apart from exceptional circumstances after a year) while their claim is being processed. They are forced to live on state benefits, though many are skilled workers with much to offer, particularly in areas where there are currently gaps in provision of some services such as the health service. Alliance would support measures to allow asylum seekers in certain circumstances to work two months after making an application and benefits would only be paid if they could not find work. This would reduce spending on benefits, increase tax revenue, help integration, lower community tensions and greatly reduce dependence on welfare and social housing.

Alliance believes it is time to take the politics out of asylum. Alliance would advocate taking responsibility away from the Home Office and give it to an independent agency, thus making decisions free from political influence. Currently 25% of decisions are overturned on appeal. In Canada, where an independent agency deals with claims, decisions are overturned less than 1% of the time. Alliance would support fast-tracking asylum claims which are obviously well-founded and channel resources into making the correct initial decisions.

Alliance would push for EU-wide co-operation on asylum to help share the burden proportionally between member states.

Alliance would end the deportation of asylum seekers to countries where they face imprisonment, torture or execution because of their sexual orientation or gender identification.

Illegal Immigration

Alliance would allow people who have been in the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland for 10 years, have a clean record and who want to live here long-term to earn citizenship thus allowing immigration services to focus their time deporting dangerous individuals and checking up on employers to stop illegal working.

Alliance believes that the priority for deportation should be on criminals, while letting law-abiding families earn citizenship. No-one knows how long and how much it would cost to deport all those who are living in the United Kingdom illegally. Immigration officers are focusing on families because they are easy targets, letting criminals off the hook.

Integration

As a result of immigration, identity is constantly being shaped and reshaped by each phase of enrichment. Immigrants should not be asked to simply assimilate into existing culture but rather to integrate into society and in doing so positively enrich the nature of our shared society.

Alliance supports further investment in support services in order to assist this process. This includes resources for English language skills. Alliance believes that the needs of a more diverse population must be taken into account within future planning and policies consistent with equality, human rights and the creation of a shared future. Furthermore, there are areas of life where immigrants are particularly vulnerable due to limited ability to communicate, including accessing medical assistance and within the criminal justice system.

Justice

Northern Ireland: Safer Communities and Justice for All

Most policing and justice powers and responsibilities relating to Northern Ireland have now transferred from Westminster to the Assembly. This is the greatest change in the balance of the devolved settlement between Westminster and the Assembly since the original devolution of powers in December 1999. Devolution provides for local control over resourcing and policy matters, with the associated enhanced accountability.

It also creates increased opportunities for joined-up government between government departments and agencies on shared objectives. Examples of this potential collaboration include ensuring that the criminal justice system assists wider efforts to build a shared future, addresses the high incidence of mental health and personality disorder issues within the prisoner and offender population, and tackles the reasons for offending and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

Alliance Party Leader, David Ford, has now assumed the role of Minister of Justice, after achieving cross-community support in the Assembly.

For Alliance, key objectives are making communities safer and ensuring fair justice for all. In working to fulfil these outcomes, the core areas for Alliance include:

- Improving confidence in the effectiveness of the agencies of the criminal justice system and the fairness of the system overall;
- Promoting a shared future within the criminal justice system, and working to ensure that the criminal justice system assists wider efforts to encourage cohesion, sharing and integration;
- Tackling avoidable delay in the criminal justice system, and improving the speed of justice;
- Ensuring greater attention is given to the needs and interests of victims and witnesses;
- Supporting police resourcing in a manner that allows more visible policing on the streets;
- Assisting the police service and other justice organisations to find ways to increase their efficiency, allowing them to operate more effectively within the parameters of their budgets, including a heavy emphasis on prevention, early intervention and collaboration;

- Raising the profile of mental health and personality disorder conditions within the criminal justice system to reflect the considerable incidence within the prisoner and offender population; and
- Driving reform of and within the Northern Ireland Prison Service, including in particular a greater focus on rehabilitation leading to lower risks of reoffending.

Alliance has set out a detailed programme for the new Department of Justice and other Departments and agencies on cross-cutting issues. This can be accessed at: www.allianceparty.org/pages/justice.html.

Our key policy commitments include:

- Encouraging greater co-operation and co-ordination between the criminal justice agencies tackling undue delay and the speed of justice, including working to agreed and shared targets;
- Providing new alternative to prosecutions for low-level offences;
- Delivering comprehensive reform of the legal aid system, including full provision of adequate funding and other resources to the disadvantaged in society, ensuring equality of access to justice for all;
- Reviewing strategies for assisting victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system and the development of a Victims' Code of Practice;
- Developing a formal set of guidelines on sentencing and on the enforcement of judgements, through the creation of a Northern Ireland Sentencing Guidelines Council;
- Facilitating of collaborative working between statutory and non-statutory agencies to drive down offending and re-offending rates;
- Creating a Northern Ireland Offender Management Strategy;
- Reviewing the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons;
- Producing a five-year community safety strategy;
- Rationalising District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships, ideally as part of wider community planning developments;
- Developing and resourcing of an active strategy to engage with communities to commence and support a process for the removal of so-called 'peace-walls';

National Security and Civil Liberties

Alliance recognises that we live in a new world order with real and substantial threats of both foreign and domestic terrorism. Alliance will always work in the best interests of all the people of the United Kingdom in supporting measures that are designed to protect the public.

There is a particular threat in Northern Ireland from dissident Republican terrorists. Alliance acknowledges that this requires a co-ordinated response from the Police Service of Northern Ireland alongside the Security Service.

Alliance will work to ensure that the interface between national security and counter-terrorism policing and local policing and criminal justice activities is smooth and effective.

Intelligence-led policing is the most effective response to the terrorists, alongside effective political and community efforts that undermine any latent support. Alliance is open to further measures that would assist the fight against terrorism, including more ready access to telephone intercepts in court proceedings.

As part of wider cohesion and community relations policies, there is a common agenda of tackling the potential radicalisation of communities both in the United Kingdom as a whole with respect to Islamic fundamentalism and in Northern Ireland with respect to dissident Republicanism.

However, Northern Ireland has a unique insight as to how counter-terrorist measures can sometimes be counterproductive in pursuit of the ultimate common goal – the peace and security of all our citizens.

Alliance MPs would support our sister party the Liberal Democrats in tabling their Freedom Bill to scrap the most intrusive and illiberal laws introduced under the Labour Government.

For Alliance, such measures would include:

- Ending the government's expensive, unnecessary and intrusive ID card scheme;
- Preventing the government from permanently storing the DNA of innocent people without their consent;
- Removing the DNA profiles of children under 16 from the DNA database, except those convicted of a violent or sexual offence;
- Supporting a full independent inquiry into British involvement with the United States' practice of rendition in any form; and
- Renegotiating the unfair extradition treaty with the United States so UK citizens are not extradited without proper evidence.

Dealing with the Past

The delivery of services to victims of the political situation in Northern Ireland is now devolved to the Assembly. Alliance welcomes and acknowledges the role played by the Victims and Survivors Commission in identifying needs and lobbying for financial, and physical and psychological support services for victims and survivors.

Alliance does not believe that it is wise or sustainable to simply draw a line under the past. There is too much hurt and too many demands for truth and justice. However, Alliance maintains that we must deal with our past in a manner that promotes reconciliation and which is consistent with a shared future.

Alliance believes that there are clear advantages to an overarching process for dealing with the past, both to provide better integrated solutions and a more cost-effective approach, in particular as an alternative to numerous individual public inquiries.

Alliance broadly endorses the recommendations of the Consultative Group on the Past. While not uncritical of aspects of the report, such as the proposed 'recognition payments', we believe that it is a credible basis on which to build. In particular, we endorse the central recommendation for the creation of a legacy commission with four separate elements, namely: reconciliation; investigations; information recovery; and thematic issues. While we are realistic about the prospects for the success of any Commission, it is worth pursuing.

Alliance recognises that more work needs to be carried out to ensure that any new institutions respect the existing good practice, including from, for example, the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) and the Community Relations Council. There also has to be a credible timescale and funding package. Alliance is opposed to any amnesty, irrespective of whether such calls are motivated to wipe the slate clean for paramilitaries or to protect the state. We believe that this idea must be ruled out to build confidence. Alliance is concerned at attempts to reinvent history and to portray what happened in Northern Ireland as a war, with the paramilitaries becoming regarded as legitimate combatants.

Alliance maintains that the HET can fulfil the investigative function under the Legacy Commission and should be guaranteed its long-term funding and future, including absorbing the pre-1998 investigative responsibilities from the Police Ombudsman. The HET is currently conducting investigations and providing a degree of information recovery.

Alliance has concerns regarding the utility and cost-effectiveness of specific inquiries compared to other potential alternatives. However, where inquiries have been commenced, Alliance believes that such inquiries should run their course. Alliance will support the prompt publication of the report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry early in the new Parliament.

Alliance also proposes the creation of an Oversight Commissioner for the various measures of dealing with the past, following the successful application of this model in other aspects of the peace process.

Good Governance

At all levels, good governance is critical for integrity in public life; evidence-based policy decisions; the fair and impartial application of rule of law; respect for equality and human rights; and efficient and effective public services.

Changes for Northern Ireland

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

Alliance has now entered government in Northern Ireland. Our Party Leader has been elected as the Justice Minister, on a cross-community vote, and has joined the Executive as a full member, based on agreed policies.

We have approached the institutions as we find them today and made an informed and considered judgement on how we can best influence outcomes consistent with our visions and values. Others need to be persuaded of the benefits of reform. We will work the institutions in good faith until then.

Alliance supported the Good Friday Agreement, despite our concerns over several aspects of the details, particularly relating to the institutions. These concerns include:

- Institutional sectarianism, including in particular the designation and related voting system in the Assembly.
- The politics of 'them' versus 'us' over control of territory and resources rather than any consideration of a shared vision and common goals for Northern Ireland.
- Co-operation, moderation and accommodation have not been incentivised, with instead entrenched intra-communal competition rewards hard-line and exclusive politics.
- The amendments from the St. Andrew's Agreement did little to address these underlying governance problems.

The recent Hillsborough Castle Agreement does not alter this flawed institutional design. The inherent weaknesses in the institutions that contributed to bad faith, poor relations, and instability between supposed partners in government remain in place.

The Hillsborough Agreement does, however, provide a new opportunity for a fresh start for the political institutions. Nevertheless, it can only be seen as a means to an end and needs to be followed up with changes.

Major aspects of the necessary changes to the political institutions would need to be taken forward at Westminster, based upon local agreement between political parties.

Alliance has a clear plan to reform the institutions of government, to establish proper devolution and to create an effective form of power-sharing in government without giving any one party a veto over our progress.

In almost every democracy, like-minded parties, or at least those prepared to co-operate together, form a voluntary coalition to govern that has either a simple, or weighted, majority support within the legislature and operating on the basis of collective responsibility. Involuntary coalitions in which parties are allocated portfolios on the basis of their comparative strength in the Assembly, irrespective of their political compatibility, risk political deadlock and policy paralysis.

Alliance will strive for the creation of a power-sharing Executive formed through negotiation. It is possible for parties to negotiate a balanced Executive, with an agreed programme for government, based on collective responsibility. It would be necessary to achieve a cross-community weighted-majority vote in the Assembly in order to come into effect. No party would have an automatic right to be in the Executive, nor could the process of governing be any longer 'held hostage'. This approach to Executive formation would provide more efficient, effective and cohesive government. It would also encourage greater co-operation among parties and better promote the concept of power sharing. We recognise the need to persuade others of this case. It cannot be done unilaterally.

Alliance will work for the introduction of an Assembly voting system for cross-community matters based on a weighted majority, free from sectarian designations.

There are four particular problems with the current system:

- The institutionalisation of sectarian division
- The inequality of votes between elected MLAs
- The inability to adjust to changing demographic and political circumstances.
- The ability of minorities to hold the process to ransom
- The introduction of a system of weighted majority voting ensures cross-community support while avoiding these difficulties.

Alliance will work to ensure the introduction of a Single Transferable Vote (STV) election among Assembly Members as the fairest system of allocating committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs. Under this system, a succession of counts of a STV ballot would be conducted among MLAs to determine a rank order of party choices of posts. The D'Hondt system is flawed as a proportional representation system. Thus the current D'Hondt mechanism for the allocation of places in the Executive, and Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs, is unrepresentative. The greater the numbers of Parties involved, the more likely it is that distortions will occur. The present system also significantly favours the larger parties. Accordingly, Alliance's proposed reforms should apply wherever the D'Hondt system is presently used.

Alliance will support a rationalisation of the number of Government Departments in Northern Ireland. This commitment is about more than just saving money, it is also about ending some of the arbitrary splits of functions between Departments and creating more efficient, effective and joined-up government.

Alliance will continue to argue that the Assembly be granted tax varying powers. It is important to ensure that any legislature is held accountable for its spending decisions and ambitions. If the Assembly had tax-varying powers, it would have the ability to set and realise its own fiscal priorities and to promote economic growth. This would take into account the differences between Northern Ireland and other UK regions and the significance of cross-border issues such as differential rates of taxation and grants. This power is central to the introduction of a lower rate of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland.

For further detail, see Alliance's proposals for reforming governance in Northern Ireland, *Agenda for Democracy*:
www.allianceparty.org/pages/agenda-for-democracy.html

Changes for the United Kingdom

There is a crisis of confidence in UK democracy. There is a lack of trust in the integrity of elected representatives. Political institutions are perceived as no longer being fit for purpose. Alliance MPs will support and abide by the new regime on expenses. We are committed to value for money.

Alliance supports the creation of a formal Written Constitution for the United Kingdom. A formal written constitution would draw together the various sources of constitutional law and convention, clarify roles and responsibilities, and reflect better the position of individual citizens.

Alliance would replace the current ‘First-Past-the-Post’ electoral system with the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system of Proportional Representation. A plurality electoral system, such as ‘First-Past-the-Post’, does not produce fair and representative outcomes in a diverse society. This is now clearly the case across the United Kingdom, and is particularly so within Northern Ireland. STV is the most effective and fair electoral system. It balances continued, and indeed enhanced, constituency representation with proportional outcomes. Voluntary coalition government works well in most European democracies.

Alliance will support ‘Votes at 16’. Young people have a stake in society. They can pay taxes and participate in the services. It is inconsistent to deny young people the right to have their say in the future.

Alliance believes that the House of Lords should be replaced by a mixed elected and appointed second chamber. The principle of inherited representation is wrong. However, there is a case for a second chamber to act as a balance to the House of Commons. Elected representatives could be elected by Proportional Representation from the 12 regions of the UK, including Northern Ireland.

Alliance will support the introduction of a register of lobbyists at Westminster. This is vital to assist in creating greater transparency. Further to this, there should be an interval before former government ministers are allowed to become lobbyists.

Alliance will support a cap on the level of donations to political parties from individual sources. The initial level of a cap should be around £10,000 per annum.

Alliance will support the consideration of a system whereby electors can recall an MP in the event of major breaches of code of conduct and law. Some detail regarding defining the grounds on which recall could proceed, and the thresholds to be set for recall petitions needs to be discussed. Safeguards would also need to be put in place to protect against abuse within a divided society such as Northern Ireland.

Alliance MPs would be full-time and will support further action against ‘double-jobbing’. Future legislation could bar MPs from holding other public offices, and also working in other jobs and professions or engaging in consultancy beyond a set number of hours annualised. There is a particular problem of some MPs earning considerable sums from directorships and consultancies which create even greater potential conflicts of interests than multiple mandates.

European & Global Affairs

Alliance is a pro-European and internationalist party. We are proud to be members of ELDR (the European Liberal Democratic and Reform party) and of Liberal International, in association with the European and international liberal families. It is vital that Northern Ireland looks beyond its own problems and engages with the world beyond our borders.

Europe

Alliance prides itself on its firm commitment to Europe. European membership has been of enormous benefit to the United Kingdom, and in particular to Northern Ireland, through promoting economic growth and prosperity, protecting the environment and supporting agriculture. The European Union (EU) has helped to promote human rights and multiculturalism.

We strongly believe that the best future for Northern Ireland is as an integrated region within a deepening and widening EU. But equally, there is a duty upon the EU to become much more open, transparent and meaningful to the citizens of Europe which it serves.

Alliance supports the principle of the United Kingdom's entry into the Euro at the earliest appropriate opportunity governed by the economic convergence criteria. We do recognise that those criteria do not clearly exist at present. Eventual membership of the Euro would bring net benefits to local businesses through greater economic certainty and confidence, lower interest rates, lower inflation, a more favourable climate for investment, greater price transparency, competition and efficiency, more efficient use of resources, reduced transaction costs and the elimination of risk associated with unstable and fluctuating exchange rates.

Alliance advocates empowering the citizen within European structures so institutions become more accountable and transparent. People should be made more aware of their rights as European citizens and possess the knowledge to use those rights in their everyday lives.

Alliance will support measures to develop and reinforce the Single Market. All member states should be encouraged to comply with their obligations.

Alliance supports an enhanced role of the European Union in financial regulation. The recent economic recession was partially international in nature and efforts to prevent a repeat are required at the European level in addition to domestic action.

Alliance will support the European Union contributing to further international trade liberalisation. This is important to support international development..

Alliance will support reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to ensure a long term sustainable agriculture sector, through shifting support from production and export subsidies towards diversification, conservation and rural development.

Alliance will work towards a co-ordinated European effort to fight organised crime and terrorism. Organised criminals and terrorists do not respect national borders. Therefore collaboration across borders by states and regions is essential. Alliance will support the maintenance of the UK's participation within the European Arrest Warrant and the European Police Office (EUROPOL).

Alliance will support the further enlargement of the European Union, including the membership of Turkey. The continued expansion of the European Union is in the interest of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole.

Global Affairs

As a liberal internationalist party, Alliance supports an international system based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Peace and the security of the United Kingdom are clearly linked to an ethical foreign policy that respects these values.

The international system has undergone considerable changes over the past two decades. New opportunities for economic prosperity have been opened through globalisation. The world has become a smaller place through easier travel and the communication and information technology revolutions. Globalisation also brings new costs for those who cannot access the new opportunities available, plus enhanced risks of financial problems spreading rapidly around the world.

Underdevelopment, poverty, famine and disease, including in particular HIV/Aids, in many parts of the world remain pressing challenges. Such problems will only be accentuated through the consequences of climate change.

The end of the Cold War has transformed the nature of security threats. Threats now come from nuclear proliferation, failed states, international terrorism, including state sponsored terrorism, genocide, crimes against humanity and other human rights abuses, religious fundamentalism and competition over scarce resources.

Alliance strongly supports a successful comprehensive Climate Change agreement. The limited agreement from the Copenhagen Summit is to be followed-up at talks in Bonn and Mexico. We also support for the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

Alliance supports the UK Government meeting and maintaining the United Nations target of 0.7% of GDP for international development aid and assistance. We further encourage the use of the UN Development Programme's Human Development Index to measure the quality of life in countries. Alliance will continue to oppose tying aid to trade.

Alliance calls for co-ordinated action led by the United Kingdom to realise the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Structural changes in the developing world, such as investment in primary education, are vital to remove the dependency on short-term aid and relief. We also urge the continuation and advancement of international leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We must put our efforts into education and preventive programmes.

Alliance advocates an open and fair international trading system. We would call in particular on the industrialised world, including the EU and the USA, to lead the way towards a more broad-based economic model to ensure that economic disasters can be mitigated.

Alliance supports fair trade initiatives. We are committed to promoting the welfare of workers in the developing world and ensuring fair prices for products.

Alliance endorses the introduction of a small tax on international financial transactions, such as the proposed ‘Tobin Tax’. Organised multilaterally, the proceeds would fund international development.

Alliance supports the effective reform of global institutions, to better promote globally agreed objectives, and recognises the central role of the United Nations in maintaining global peace and security. Alliance looks forward to a world based upon the rule of law. We endorse the work of the UN and NGOs in promoting democracy, pluralism, respect for human rights, and good governance. We urge the UK Government to support the creation of a Standing Rapid Reaction Force for the UN.

Alliance call for the consolidation of the grounds for international humanitarian intervention on the basis of the ‘responsibility to protect’ doctrine, in order to better to address mass abuse of human rights and the consequences of natural disasters on a more consistent basis.

Alliance continues to support the fight against slave labour, human trafficking and advocates the end of UK support for arms sales to countries engaged in these activities.

Defence

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

Alliance believes that no serviceman or woman should be sent into conflict on less basic pay than the starting salary of a police constable. Alliance salutes the courage and hard work of those who put themselves in harm's way in service of their fellow citizens. Alliance believes firmly that this should be rewarded with the fair pay and conditions that service personnel deserve. The deployment of service personnel into battle without proper equipment has thrown the spotlight on just how much money has been wasted through poor decision-making. We would ensure taxpayers' money is spent more effectively on equipping the armed forces for the tasks of the future, not past threats. There is also a need for greater support and services for returning service personnel and also for their families.

Alliance will support a Strategic Defence Review. We believe that the balance of investment in the armed services needs to change to reflect the different challenges of peacekeeping and peacemaking. There are pressing demands for investment in armoured protection and transport for troops and in the pay and living standards for service personnel and their families.

Alliance has seen no evidence to suggest that the like-for-like renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system is necessary or cost-effective. Alliance believes that other approaches can be found to ensure the nuclear security of the United Kingdom with a different focus to reflect the security challenges of the future rather than refighting the Cold War. The UK can help combat nuclear proliferation by leading by example in reducing nuclear weapons as part of agreed multilateral efforts.

**Sharing Works
division costs**

**Respect Works
bigotry costs**

**Delivery Works
deadlock costs**

**Justice Works
crime costs**

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