

Alliance Party Governance Paper: **Solutions for transparent and accountable** **Government**

Alliance stands for politics which are open, transparent and accountable. To this end we propose the following changes to governance in Northern Ireland to ensure you can trust Government to deliver an effective service for you and give you the capacity to hold Ministers and politicians to account.

Transparency in politics and Government

- Publish political donations - let the public know who donates money to Northern Ireland's political parties, backdated to January 2014.
- Ensure that all Executive policies are "shared future-proofed" so all public investment supports and underpins an open, peaceful and united society rather than continuing division.
- Further develop the North-South Ministerial Council, including the creation of a work plan that is informed by a Programme for Government in each jurisdiction.
- Introduce a lobbying register in Northern Ireland.
- Develop an Open Data Strategy for all Executive departments.

'Normalise' Government in Northern Ireland

- Reform the Assembly to create a more accountable government-and-opposition political system. We will replace the current cross-community voting system, which is based on community designations, with a weighted majority system free from designations. The weighted majority system would be used in circumstances designed in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 or where a reformed Petition of Concern is invoked.

- Reform the Petition of Concern by limiting it to only matters of identity or relating to legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland, or matters which relate to the constitutional structure and institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement.
- Establishing a coalition which is decided through voluntary negotiation between parties and subject to a vote in the Assembly. Collective responsibility must apply.

Hold Ministers and their Special Advisers accountable

- Publish salaries of all Ministers, MLAs, MLAs holding positions of responsibility and Special Advisers (SpAds) on an annual basis.
- Open Ministerial and their SpAd diaries to the public.
- Ministers will be required to sign up to a Conduct of Executive Business contract before they can take part in the Executive.
- Ministerial meetings, including meetings a SpAd has in relation to Ministerial business, must always be minuted and available for scrutiny.
- Ministers who fail to deliver adequately against the Conduct of Executive Business (for example failure to answer Freedom of Information questions within the specified time or failure to respond or provide poor quality answers to Assembly Questions) can be referred to the Commissioner for Standards for investigation. If found to have breached the Ministerial Code or standards set down in the Conduct of Executive Business, the Minister can be removed from office and barred from holding Ministerial office for up to five years.
- Expand the Assembly Commissioner for Standards role to include Ministers and the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, as well as MLAs.
- By reforming the Petition of Concern, sanctions proposed by the Assembly Commissioner for Standards will no longer be able to be blocked.
- Ensure Ministers are ultimately accountable for the actions of their SpAds.
- Review the accountability and disciplinary procedures for SpAds.

High standards across all public offices

- **Strengthen investigations into Ministerial wrong-doing by placing the Ministerial Code on a stronger legal footing and establishing independent investigations into alleged breaches of it.**
- **Require Ministers to complete a full declaration of their interests including details of financial interests, directorships and shareholdings, public and charitable appointments, close family interests and a commitment that outside interests will not conflict with their duty to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct.**
- **Guidance to be provided by the Commissioner's office on the use of private digital communications by Ministers and SpAds for Ministerial business.**
- **All gifts and hospitality of £140 and over to be published on a quarterly basis.**
- **Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations and individuals must be published on a quarterly basis by the relevant department. Note: consideration for sensitive meetings will be taken with rational for withholding information provided and filed with said information.**
- **Civil servants to be present at all Ministerial meetings to record and maintain minutes.**
- **Senior officials within the Northern Ireland Assembly should be subject to the same transparency measures as their equivalent grades in the senior (Northern Ireland) Civil Service.**
- **Amend Standing Orders to ensure the rules of the Assembly are changed to these set out in these proposals within 12 weeks of the establishment of the Assembly.**

Alliance's 4 Proposals for an Accountable Government for NI

- 1. Transparency in politics and Government**
- 2. 'Normalise' Government in Northern Ireland**
- 3. Hold Ministers and their Special Advisers to Account**
- 4. High standards across all public offices**