FORWARD. FASTER.

Alliance Manifesto for Belfast City Council
2017-19

Towards a truly Shared, Open and Liveable City

3 Policy Areas
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Preface

Alliance has a record of taking tough decisions, fairness and being the voice of common sense and responsibility. We are proudly European and will strive to get the best deal possible for the city following the Brexit vote.

We are setting out our plan to deliver this, showing what we have already delivered and what we intend to deliver in the coming years through our three policy areas, 100 goals and top ten commitments.

A Shared Belfast

An Open Belfast

A Liveable Belfast
Our Top 10 Commitments for Belfast City Council 2017-19

1. Ensure shared future proofing is introduced.

2. Support the creation of City language strategy.

3. Campaigning to establish a City Growth strategy and recognising that Greater Belfast is the key economic driver for the region.

4. Securing the devolution of regeneration powers to Belfast City Council.

5. Alliance will continue to promote openness and transparency in the Council through setting up a ‘junket watch’ group to ensure that our Councillors only attend conferences or events that provide real value for money for ratepayers as well as ensuring that future community funding programmes are run by open competition and advertisement.
6. Alliance will support the creation of a second major tourist attraction for Belfast which will include space to promote the arts and musical heritage through the provision of world class facilities.

7. Campaigning for equality on leisure provision across the city.

8. Support the spread of the Belfast bikes scheme into all parts of the city along with the development of appropriate infrastructure.

9. Support increased recycling and ensure that household glass recycling is available to all.

10. Alliance will develop and further a cohesive youth strategy that holds young people at the centre of decision making processes that affect them.
A Shared Belfast

We want to see the creation of a truly shared city which welcomes diversity, is outward looking and which thrives.

Delivered

1. Alliance delivered first removal of a peace wall in North Belfast.
2. Compromise delivered regarding flag flying policy at City Hall.
3. Instrumental in delivering an agreed memorabilia agenda for the development of City Hall.
4. Leading the way in developing ways to tackle the abuse of symbols on street furniture.
5. Proposed a motion in City Hall backing Equal Marriage. We are supportive of events that promote understanding, acceptance and respect for the LGBTQ community in Belfast.
6. Our group is representative of the city, in terms of religion and gender, unlike all other groups.
7. Proposed the use of shared future proofing in terms of all Council decisions.
8. Supporting the plight of refugees through Council motions to ensure they are welcomed.
9. Homeless strategy backed to support a multi-agency forum to tackle the issue.
10. Involved in the Council’s Women’s Steering Group which has been instrumental in raising the profile of the contribution of women in political and civic life through the placement of a stained-glass window celebrating International Women’s Day; a City Hall tour focusing solely on the role of women; the mentoring of female officers and Council staff and the advancement of plans for family friendly policies and spaces within City Hall.
11. Supported projects aimed at increasing cooperation such as cross Lagan bridge.
12. Supportive of existing Sister City and other links such as MIPIM to promote Belfast as a place for inward investment.
Jointly proposed a motion calling for the Government to recognise that Belfast and NI had voted to remain in the EU and that this must be considered in negotiations.

Provided a key role in re-establishing the links with Nashville to promote cultural and tourist potential as well as potential investment.

Alliance has played a key role in the development of the Good Relations Partnership, now called the Shared City Partnership.

Proposed that Belfast becomes a Compassionate City, ensuring that we strive to be a truly warm, welcoming and inclusive city.

100 Goals – our to do list

1 Ensure shared future proofing is introduced. We will introduce “shared future-proofing”, a formal assessment of each policy the council makes to analyse whether it harms or helps our move towards integration. This will include assessing new policies for their impact on sharing space, reducing tensions and removing the physical manifestations of division. Alliance already introduced this when we were in the Executive and believes that this should be run in parallel with equality screening.

2 Solve the issue of abuse of flags on street furniture.

3 Create an effective strategy to celebrate loyalist cultural activities such as bonfires, recognising that the current scheme fails to meet the tests of a culture of lawfulness or addressing equality and good relations goals. We will propose pausing the current review of the bonfire scheme and ring-fence the money spent to be used in the participating areas in a way which will promote improved relations and better environmental results for all. This will involve engaging through local community and statutory organisations and will require an input from the Executive.

4 Deliver Marriage Equality in Belfast through work with our Assembly team.

5 Alliance will develop and further a cohesive youth strategy that holds young people at the centre of decision making processes that affect them. Support increased connection with community and voluntary groups tasked with youth engagement including the Council’s Youth Forum.
6 Supporting long term and strategic provisions and promoting a joined up approach to actions that will encourage young people to become more active in society eg Youth Park Run, Political Education programmes, Community Relations initiatives and encouraging a move away from short term diversionary work with young people.

7 Reduce hate crime by 20% by 2021 by developing city and neighbourhood community safety programmes.

8 Develop further intergenerational relationship programmes.

9 Resolving the memorabilia issue in the grounds of City Hall.

10 Support the production of a City language strategy, which will recognise that English is the language of choice in the city but that the Irish language should be promoted given that the city has the highest number of Irish speakers in Northern Ireland and has a rich cultural heritage in the city.

   We will also ensure that the cultural aspects of Ulster-Scots are recognised and work with newcomers to ensure that they have adequate facilities to allow them to participate in society effectively. Specifically, we will support investment in the development of the Irish language particularly to non-traditional groups. As a result, we are supportive of an Irish Language officer and increased visibility of the language. We will work to develop a regional position on street signage.

11 EU funding – Peace funding has helped to promote peace and reconciliation. It has also funded programmes to improve community relations. However, it is unclear what will happen to this funding following Brexit. We will continue to make the best use for current EU funding and argue for a replacement after Brexit whilst fighting for clarity and reassurances for the community and voluntary sector.

12 Promote improved relations by developing stronger international links with other cities with a history of division through organisations such as the Forum for Cities in Transition.

13 Promotion of the development of shared spaces and maintenance of those that exist.

14 Support sharing as key component of City Centre Regeneration Strategy.
15 Promotion of events in spaces to help develop shared spaces in City festivals.

16 Support Belfast Shared Space programme.

17 Disability – Alliance believes that the council must work for everyone in our society, so we have paid attention to the needs of under-represented groups.

18 We will work to create more family friendly facilities in the Council.

19 Homeless – Continue to use the Council to convene statutory/voluntary and community partners on raising awareness and showing civic leadership.

20 Travellers – Support the Traveller Forum. Issues around representation and inclusion must be addressed.

21 Footbridges including across the Lagan.

22 Develop a strategy to see the removal of peace walls across the City.

23 Ensure that the work of the Resilience Commissioner is to include dealing with division in the city.

24 Promotion of shared housing schemes as part of future developments.

25 Ensuring that planning decisions help ensure the creation of a more integrated city.

26 Design and deliver a Belfast Shared Space programme. This would allow the development of sustainable areas of shared space and build leadership in the area amongst participants.

27 Economic investment, including better links with sister cities. Belfast has a global reputation as a rejuvenated city, we need to capitalise on this by encouraging investment from abroad. We will work with Invest NI to continue to promote Belfast as a city for investment. We have strong links with our sister cities (Nashville and Boston in the United States; Hefei and Shenyang in China) and will continue to use these links to raise Belfast’s profile and attractiveness for investment.

We will also develop links to establish best practice, tackle division and promote cultural links and tourist potential.
Campaigning to get Belfast and NI the best deal in Brexit talks. Brexit has the potential to damage Belfast and its economic attractiveness to investors – especially if investors decide on Dublin as an alternative location. We must respect the referendum result, but it is also important to recognise that both Belfast and Northern Ireland voted to remain. Both the Council and the NI Executive must now draw up a plan for Brexit which maintains access to the single market, retains free movement with the Republic of Ireland and minimises the impact on our economy.

We will continue to proudly highlight the benefits of being European for the people of NI.

Citywide commitment to Belfast place positioning. Alliance will campaign for a joined-up approach between the different levels of government in Northern Ireland to better achieve this and will back the City Ambassador Programme and work to develop a City Marketing Strategy.

Arterial routes – We will work with other levels of Government to ensure that arterial routes, which form people’s first impression of the city, are free of graffiti, sectarian symbols of territorial demarcation.
An Open Belfast

Alliance will support the development of real openness. We will do what we can to make Belfast open for business, including in the development of the digital economy. We will promote openness and transparency in the Council and always be committed to providing value for money.

Delivered

1. Key supporters of the City Council Investment Programme in 2012 to tackle the effects of the economic downturn, which has provided £340 million investment in the city including external funding.

2. Supporters of the development of a Belfast Agenda to allow all stakeholders to create a shared vision of the city.

3. Supported the redevelopment of the Waterfront to provide sufficient conference facilities for the city. This has resulted in the attraction of 50 major conferences between now and 2021 and the potential of 94,000 delegate days.

4. Backed the development of the City Centre Regeneration strategy to drive economic growth in Belfast.

5. Backing the strategy of social enterprises renting shops for reduced rates.


7. An Alliance Employment and Learning Minister delivered a new strategy to radically transform the apprenticeship system.

8. The Minister also froze tuition fees for local students attending NI universities, delivered over 1,400 additional university places in Science and Technology and developed a new strategy to give Further Education Colleges a central role in providing skills for industry and supporting employers. As a result of his initiatives, he assisted over 40,000 young people to secure employment.

9. As Minister, he introduced shared parental leave and greater access to flexible working.

10. Ensured that all Council committee minutes, including the Planning committee, are audio recorded, despite significant opposition.
11 Proposed the publication of Minutes on the Council website and the webcasting of full Council meetings to encourage public participation in the democratic process.

12 Support that Councillor expenses and allowances are published.

13 Proposed at Westminster that all party-political donations meeting the GB threshold of £7,500 should be published.

14 Publish party donations on our party website.

15 Alliance supports responsible stewardship of ratepayers’ money and supported the Council having a zero percent increase in rates during the economic downturn and continues to support rises which are below the rate of inflation.

16 Instituted a programme after this year’s rates setting process to ensure that potential efficiency programmes were brought to Councillors immediately.

17 Supported the development of the running of leisure facilities by GLL which will ensure that there are £2 million of efficiency savings which will be fed into the leisure transformation process annually.

18 Alliance supports reducing segregation which will help to unlock the Council’s share of the estimated £1 billion costs of division in Northern Ireland.

19 Alliance delivered on our promise to prevent the spending of £700,000 on the provision of ‘SPAD’s for Council groups at City Hall leading to the idea being scrapped.

20 Alliance Councillors have voted for a freeze on Councillor allowances for the rest of this term.

**100 Goals – our to do list**

31 Promoting City Centre and High Street – The recession has been hard on many local shopping and business districts and many streets in Northern Ireland now have vacant and closed shops. Alliance believes that if the economic recovery is going to benefit everybody, every community in Northern Ireland must be fulfilling its economic potential. This means that as well as investing in big projects, we must invest in town centres, high streets, local districts and urban villages.
Unfortunately, the high street will not be the same as it has been in the past and we will need to reconsider what we want it to look like. This will mean a mix of shops, cafes and restaurants, residential properties and non-retail businesses. This will help to ensure vibrant community economies despite trends towards out-of-town retail centres and internet shopping.

The strategy to develop town centres and high streets would include:

• Bringing in other new and innovative models of funding and investment.
• Providing easier access for cars and public transport to local high streets and town centres, including promoting free short-term parking.
• Prioritising town centres, rather than out-of-town retail centres, as the preferred sites for retail and business development.
• Supporting the development of Royal Exchange.

32 Reforming rating policies for local businesses – Reforming business rates to make it easier for entrepreneurs to establish a business in vacant premises, such as scrapping business rates for the first year for a new business.

Developing Business Improvement Districts, whereby businesses fund regeneration in their area through a levy on business rates.

33 Reviewing licencing legislation – Organising a comprehensive review of licensing legislation, run by both the Department for the Economy and the Department for Communities, to develop a modern approach that meets our leisure, tourism and economic needs.

34 Promoting entrepreneurship for young people.

35 Supporting increased Grade A office accommodation provision in the city centre.

36 Improving skills levels, including setting a target of 78% with Level 2 qualifications and 38% with Level 4 qualifications by 2025 through improved training.

37 Calling for the promotion of a Belfast Skills programme.

38 Developing a Belfast Works employability programme.
39 Setting up an Employability Framework and devolving this to the city region for implementation through large scale skills and employment programmes.

40 Securing the devolution of regeneration powers to Belfast City Council.

41 Supporting the creation of a City Resilience Strategy.

42 Attracting £1 billion of private sector FDI by 2025 through a coordinated strategy between the Council, adjoining Councils, the Assembly and Westminster.

43 Campaigning to establish a City Growth strategy and recognising that Greater Belfast is the key economic driver for the region.

44 Create a Small Business Champion to promote the needs of small and medium sized businesses. Provide additional support for small businesses and help develop sectors such as cyber security, fintech and film making.

45 Promoting improved cooperation between Belfast and surrounding Council areas to create a dynamic economic driver.

46 Backing a City events and festivals framework to encourage tourism and promote the creative economy.

47 Supporting the development of a Local Development Plan which will encourage investment.

48 Encourage the regeneration of the city centre by encouraging more people to live in the city centre, including by developing brownfield sites.

49 Support the establishment of an Economic Forum for the city to include the private sector, business organisations and the Council. This would support inclusive economic growth. We believe that the Council and Executive should work together to develop innovative forms of financing for major regeneration schemes.

50 Supporting funding of key infrastructure projects in the city centre including The Transport Hub and York Street interchange.

51 Encourage the continued development of the Titanic Quarter for tourist amenities.

52 Supporting the creation of a second world-class tourist facility in Belfast.

53 We will consider the introduction of a derelict land tax.
54 Promote the development of a dynamic Eastern Corridor, linking Dublin, Belfast and towns and cities in between, by working with Central and local Government in the Republic.

55 Support the development of a high speed inter-city rail link between Dublin and Derry with a hub in Belfast.

56 Support changes of the Sunday trading laws to increase opening hours for city centre businesses.

57 Work to address ongoing fuel poverty by supporting an equitable funding model for schemes such as the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

58 Propose the webcasting of all Council committees subject to financial constraints.

59 Open Data – We will push for an innovative and forward thinking approach to Open Data, which will make more effective use of the currently held data sets of Council statistics. We will liaise with industry leaders to utilise these data sets in ways which will promote openness of information, tourism benefits and both investment and learning opportunities.

60 Landlords regulation.
We want to see the NI Assembly:

• Introduce legislation to improve the regulation of the private rented sector, focusing on increasing security of tenure, improving standards in poorer homes and reducing up-front fees.

• Introduce a regulatory mechanism for letting agencies.

61 Ensure that future funding programmes are run by open competition and advertisement to ensure that money is allocated to those who are most deserving. This would involve significant changes to any future LIF and BIF programmes.

62 Support the introduction of Third Party appeals for planning applications to ensure that both developers and objectors have similar rights to appeal decisions.

63 Alliance supports the incorporation of shared future proofing of policies and funding decisions which will ensure that there is a reduction in money spent on funding division.

64 Alliance will ensure that every effort is made to ensure that Council facilities are open to all sections of the community, so reducing the need for duplication of services.
65 Alliance will set up a ‘junket watch’ group to ensure that our Councillors only attend conferences or events that provide real value for money for ratepayers. We will also highlight any trips that we believe do not provide value for money.

66 Alliance will ensure that personal development money is spent in a responsible manner by our group and others.

67 Alliance will support the ongoing catering review to reduce costs.

68 Alliance will call for the development of a strict policy on costs spent on travel and accommodation by Councillors and Council staff to ensure value for money and to help build public confidence that developing links elsewhere is beneficial for ratepayers.

69 Belfast City App – We will support the updating and promotion of the My Belfast app that will allow greater connectivity between residents, Council departments and elected representatives. We will liaise with residents to learn more about how and in what format they want to access Council services.

70 Support a members’ portal that will allow elected representatives greater digital freedom to fulfil their duties and engage in their Council work to make it more effective for Councillors, staff and ratepayers.

71 Digital Hub – We want to see Belfast leading the way in terms of digital capacity of its citizens. We will support and encourage schemes that help raise the digital literacy of our ratepayers. We will help to promote the ongoing work of the Council and its partners in increasing the capacity of everyone to access digital education and training.

We will work closely with innovative projects to support ongoing and emerging opportunities for upcoming digital industries and employment streams.
A Liveable Belfast

We will support the development of a liveable city with a focus on making Belfast healthier, greener and culturally vibrant.

Delivered

1. Leisure provision - Supported the development of the running of leisure facilities by GLL which will ensure that there are £2 million of efficiency savings to be fed into the leisure transformation process annually.

2. Opposed plans to close the Robinson Centre without developing an interim solution. All other party groups voted against us on this, leaving much of South and East Belfast without a leisure centre for up to four years.

3. Supported the £105 million leisure investment to provide better leisure facilities for all.

4. Alliance supported the retention of the Comber Greenway when others wanted to develop it and has been a keen supporter of the Connswater Greenway Project since its inception.

5. Alliance proposed the Council smoking ban in Council premises to promote a healthier environment.

6. Alliance has supported the Belfast Bikes scheme.

7. Alliance has led on making mental health issues the core of the public health agenda through backing motions on Belfast becoming a zero-suicide city.

8. Alliance co-proposed the bestowing of the Freedom of the City on nurses.

9. Alliance has campaigned to protect the green belt on the edges of the city.

10. Actively promoted and backed the redevelopment of the Waterfront Hall to make it into a world class conference and concert venue.

11. Have proactively worked to ensure that recycling rates have increased for decades.

13 As keen players in the Assembly working group on Cycling, we have worked to promote increased cycle routes and safety.
14 Proposed that fox hunting and hunting with snares should be banned in Northern Ireland.
15 Long-time advocates for harsher action for those involved in animal cruelty, culminating in the Alliance Justice Minister introducing tougher sentencing guidelines in cases of animal cruelty.
16 Supported the introduction of a Living Wage policy for employees in the Council.
17 NI Environment Week strongly supported by Alliance.
18 Led opposition to cuts to the Arts sector by the Executive.
19 Backed the Council giving financial support to retain the Ulster Orchestra.

100 Goals – our to do list
72 Establishment of more green areas – Councils own a large number of green spaces and parks that they manage on our behalf and they should be available to all residents to use responsibly. These spaces include parks, children’s playgrounds, allotments and other similar facilities. The new district Councils will be able to use these to promote well-being and leisure. Alliance believes that district Councils should place protection of these green spaces at the heart of the leisure agenda and seek opportunities to enable more people to use them – promoting their facilities and investing in them when needed.
73 Expansion of Belfast Bikes scheme – We will further develop the ‘Belfast Bikes’ scheme, with stations planned in a wider range of locations. We will seek to fund this through private sponsorship where possible.
Better provision for mental health – Alliance will ensure mental health considerations are considered in community planning, so that it is at the core of the local community. We will promote efforts to de-stigmatise mental health. We strongly support plans to make Belfast a zero-suicide city.

Supporting health charities – We will consider how funding health charities can help meet the council’s aims. This will include the role they can play in our community planning processes.

Alliance will work with the Council to promote, improve and increase its current smoking cessation programmes, liaising with charities already at the forefront of this work. We will support further training for officers and elected representatives around initiatives such as No Smoking Day.

Set an ambitious target to increase the numbers actively participating in sporting activity.
- Support the development of free cycle lessons to encourage cycling.
- Propose the development of a Belfast cycling map in conjunction with other interested parties.

Promote the development of an integrated active living and leisure programme across Belfast.

Develop an integrated city programme to improve mental health wellbeing by working with partners.

Campaigning for equality on leisure provision across the city to address the current underinvestment in East and South Belfast seen in the lack of 3/4G football pitch provision, floodlit facilities and lack of leisure centres.

St George’s Market – We will promote St George’s Market, and Belfast’s other markets, using the council’s new powers over tourism to do so.

Food waste – We support the expansion of a commercial food waste collection service and support FareShare (NI) which takes overstock food from some of the large supermarkets and food producers around the city to distribute to charities supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged households.
Famous Belfast personalities – We will continue to support projects such as CS Lewis Square and the George Best house to promote tourism through the great wealth of sporting, art, literary and musical entertainers.

Café culture – We will promote a café culture across Belfast, using regeneration and community planning powers to facilitate this.

Licensing laws reform – Alliance will support reform of the licensing laws to make them fit for purpose.

Alliance will support the creation of a second major tourist attraction for Belfast which will include space to promote the arts and musical heritage through the provision of world class facilities.

Alliance will support the development of the Belfast Story concept, focusing on the history of the city, including the Troubles, as part of any second tourist attraction.

Recycling – We will push the council to meet the highest recycling standards by the Northern Ireland Executive. This will include developing a Recycling and Waste Management Strategy, setting an ambitious 60% target and ensuring that the variations on what can be recycled in various parts of Belfast is standardised by pushing for the widest type of waste to be collected. We will push for regional action to improve Northern Ireland’s recycling infrastructure. We will particularly push to ensure that glass can be recycled at every home.

Energy from Waste – Alliance acknowledges that energy from waste is a safe and environmentally-friendly way of producing energy. However, not every location is suitable for such a facility. We will consider whether some areas of Belfast are appropriate for such a technology.
90 Solar panels – Although most energy policy is decided by the Northern Ireland Executive, district Councils can play a significant role in reducing their own environmental impact and developing renewable energy on public buildings in their area. By setting this important example, we can also make it clear that Northern Ireland is committed to reducing our environmental impact. Belfast Council should tackle its carbon emissions in two ways. It should make sure that its buildings are well-insulated and Alliance will push for the Council to examine whether their properties are suitable for solar or wind energy. This will help stimulate green investment in the area and will also reduce the Council’s energy bills in the long run. We will also seek to put renewal energy in the Councils community planning processes. We will also work with other parts of NI’s government to promote solar panels within the planning system and for new developments.

91 Cycle routes and free cycle clinics – We will invest in further cycle lanes, safe cycle storage and cycling advice to continue to promote cycling within Belfast. We will work with the Department for Infrastructure to develop their Cycling Strategy and ensure cycling infrastructure is developed across the city.

92 Increase public transport – We will work with the Department for Infrastructure to develop a better range of transport routes across Belfast. We will work together with surrounding Councils to improve connectivity in the Greater Belfast area, so reducing congestion.

93 Species champion – We support the introduction of the Northern Ireland Species Champion Initiative by Northern Ireland Environment Link to the Council. This initiative creates better awareness of wildlife conservation issues through championing wildlife and developing stronger relationships between civic and political society.

94 Grass cutting – We will push for a joint strategy between the Department for Infrastructure and the Council to ensure that grass cutting on public routes is regularly undertaken. We will support the use of sponsorship by private businesses to improve green areas and back the introduction of environmentally friendly measures, such as wild flower planting, to reduce maintenance costs.
95 Friends of Roselawn and other City Cemeteries – We will support the development of volunteer groups who will help to maintain and protect local cemeteries from anti-social behaviour.

96 Increase dog friendly spaces in our parks to allow animals to exercise safely.

97 Further promotion of a new Green Deal – Supporting the development of more Carbon neutral homes as part of any planning strategy in order to protect the environment and reduce fuel poverty.

98 Will support the development of our parks to extend their usage.

99 Alliance recognises the substantial social and economic contribution which students and Universities make to Belfast. We also condemn, without reservation, the anti-social behaviour which affects areas with large student populations. We recognise the efforts of many agencies and the Interagency group for their work on the issue for many years, and we will campaign for the reintroduction of wardens, the installation of CCTV, better regulation of private landlords and options for more rigorous enforcement of Council bye-laws.

100 Support the development of an ambitious, city-wide aquatics strategy to allow for residents to excel at sports such as swimming, diving and water polo.
Alliance offers people a clear and ambitious alternative vision for the future, while helping create a united community which is progressive, liberal, fair and open.

Alliance Leader
Naomi Long MLA