

Leading **Change**



Alliance



The Alliance Party is Leading Change in Northern Ireland

... Alliance demonstrates the potential that exists for the Assembly to legislate for change...

We believe in being constructive and in providing solutions.

Over the past four years, while the Assembly has survived and completed its full term, it has not lived up to its full potential. Far too often, opportunities for positive change in this society have been missed or much needed reforms have stalled due to political deadlock.

Alliance is conscious that the Northern Ireland Assembly is first and foremost a legislative Assembly.

While devolution is about making laws and policies, and taking decisions over the allocation of resources to meet local circumstances, Northern Ireland is increasingly falling behind other regions in terms of the areas in which it is legislating.

Although there have been a number of legislative milestones, most notably the first devolved Justice Bill in forty years, there remains a large number of areas where the law in Northern Ireland is no longer fit for purpose, those in which crucial reforms are not being made, and where requirements to provide a modern regulatory framework have not been met. Furthermore, there have been missed opportunities to provide legislative solutions to address certain problems that are particular to Northern Ireland, most notably our continued divisions.

Through this document, Alliance demonstrates the potential that exists for the Assembly to legislate for change in Northern Ireland.

The legislation outlined below is in addition to other policies that can be implemented without the need for legislation, details of these will be provided in our forthcoming manifesto.

We are the first party in Northern Ireland to ever publish specific plans for legislation for a future Assembly term. Alliance is the party that is Leading Change for all.

Rebalancing the economy

Enabling Bill for Corporation Tax

The Alliance Party is committed to rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy and the growth of the private sector relative to the public sector. Alliance supports the call for a differential rate of Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland, ideally at 12.5%. 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 and also shifting the pressure on indigenous businesses from managing costs to maximising profits, the productivity gap with the rest of the UK would be closed and there would be an increase in export-orientated growth. Alliance is committed to any necessary legislation in Northern Ireland to take advantage of the opportunity that would arise if the UK Parliament devolves the power to vary the level of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland to the Assembly.

A safe and secure society

Faster, Fairer Justice Bill

This Bill will develop the significant reshaping agenda that David Ford initiated in his first year as Minister of Justice. It will include measures arising from the current Review of Access to Justice, measures to place a Code of Practice for Victims on a statutory basis, strengthen protections for victims of domestic violence, and measures to reduce the length of time between the point where a person is charged with an offence and the case is dealt with by the courts.

Justice Miscellaneous Provision Bill

This Bill will build on the wide-ranging measures which are contained in the Justice Bill (currently in its final stages in the Assembly). The legislation will include measures to take forward current reforms, the outcomes of the review of the youth justice system and community sentences and provide a statutory footing for the Prisoner Ombudsman.

Biometric Data Retention Reform Bill

This Bill would develop a new, human-rights compliant, framework for the lawful retention of DNA and fingerprint data by criminal justice agencies.

Delivering better government and protecting front line services

Governance Bill

Alliance has an ambitious agenda for democracy in Northern Ireland, including reshaping the political institutions and their rules. Many of the necessary changes such as the method of forming the Executive and appointing Ministers, abolishing designations and changing the voting system in the Assembly - are the responsibility of Westminster. Other necessary changes, such as reducing the number of Departments, do not require legislation. However, there are a number of necessary reforms that do require local legislation. In order to better combat the silo mentality, a duty should be placed on all Departments to co-operate and collaborate to meet general objectives. These could include promoting community safety and combating crime; promoting public health; working for sustainable development; and promoting a shared future.

Local Government Review of Public Administration Bill

Legislation is required to complete the delivery of the Local Government aspects of the Review of Public Administration. Progress on this aspect of public administration reform has become frustrated due to political deadlock. Any Bill or Bills would cover the modernisation and governance agenda currently out for public consultation by the Department of the Environment, the formal creation of the new 11 District Councils and the subsequent transfer of new functions and responsibilities. It is estimated that the reform of local government could deliver projected savings of up to £438 million over a 25-year period.

... an ambitious agenda
for democracy in
Northern Ireland...



our actions count

Education and Skills Authority Bill

This bill would establish the Education Skills Authority (ESA) to replace the Education and Library Boards and other bodies such as the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; the Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards; and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. ESA would provide the functions and services currently delivered by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, plus some functions currently carried out by the Department of Education. This body will save money through economies of scale (an estimated £21million in its first two years of operation) as well as ensuring standardisation of school support across Northern Ireland. This reform should have been passed by the Assembly in 2009, but has been parked due to political disagreements.

NI Water Governance Bill

This Bill would provide for the transformation of Northern Ireland Water into a mutual company. The current status of NI Water as a government-owned company is not sustainable, and bringing it back under the direct control of the Department for Regional Development would undermine efficiency drives, reverse efficiency gains of recent years, and require more costs to be borne through the Block Grant with the consequent opportunity costs for other investments in public services and the economy. By contrast, the mutualisation of NI Water and the creation of a self-financing business model would allow the servicing of long-term borrowing for investment in the upgrade of infrastructure, and also provide a means to drive further efficiency gains.

A Bill to Create an Independent Environment Protection Agency

Environmental governance and regulation in Northern Ireland is not fit for purpose. Currently the system of environmental regulation is not sufficiently independent from government departments and agencies. Furthermore, it is inefficient as it lies with a mixture of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies controlled by three government departments. The creation of an integrated and independent Environmental Protection Agency would result in a more efficient and effective system. It is estimated that the cost of establishing an EPA in Northern Ireland and associated re-organisation would be offset by efficiency gains within five years. In addition, it would limit the risk of large infraction fines from the European Union over inadequate environmental management and protection.

Winter Gritting Bill

This Bill would address the current gaps in legislation which does not provide a clear duty on either the Department of Regional Development or District Councils with respect to the gritting of footpaths. This bill would also clarify the laws in relation to the liability faced by the public in clearing or gritting footpaths or roads.

Sustaining a first class education system

Early Education and Care Bill

An Early Education and Care Act would formally recognise the importance of the 0-6 age group and ensure the planning, financing, regulation and co-ordination of services for young children. Such an Act would clearly outline the responsibility of the Executive to provide appropriate care and education services for young children, including childcare provision and the appointment of a lead department. Adequate pre-school provision is beneficial to the economy allowing parents and guardians to combine parenthood with either employment or studies, and is vital to the welfare and education of our children.

Shared and Integrated Education Bill

This Bill will provide a clear framework and system of support for the development of shared and integrated education. It would update and strengthen the provisions of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which created a duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. This legislation builds on the Alliance Motion passed by the Assembly in November 2010 that the Minister for Education should actively promote a system of shared and integrated education throughout Northern Ireland. The Bill would ensure that the educational, economic and social benefits of integrated education are realised and mainstreamed. Aspects of the Bill would include a commitment that the Department should work with the local community when a new school is planned; a reform of the criteria required for the creation and maintenance of an integrated school that recognises the range of identities in Northern Ireland including those children of mixed, other or no religious background; the on-going promotion of shared learning schemes; and area based planning focused on community and educational need rather than on a sectoral basis.

Creating a shared future

Shared Housing Bill

The development of mixed or integrated housing is one of the key aspects of building a shared future in Northern Ireland. This Bill would create a duty on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to encourage and facilitate the creation of mixed housing. This would mirror the existing duty on the Department of Education with respect to integrated education, and parallel its review. Arising from this, the NIHE would be required to actively market all new housing projects as integrated, and have a responsibility to take measures to protect existing examples of mixed housing.

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Comprehensive Languages Bill

This Bill would put into effect the legislative aspects of a comprehensive languages strategy for Northern Ireland. A comprehensive language strategy would cover both indigenous languages and other spoken languages used within Northern Ireland, as well as the various sign languages. Legislative aspects could extend to creating a duty on public bodies to develop language schemes that meet the identified needs of their user base rather than a 'rights-based' approach.

Shared Future Policy Proofing

Complementing the Governance Reform Bill and to support a strategic focus on creating shared future and removing the financial burden of duplication within the system a new form of policy proofing in relation to sharing over separation could be introduced. This would be broader than the existing good relations duty that falls on all Departments and agencies.

Making the most of natural and cultural assets

National Park Bill

This Bill would provide for the creation and designation of National Park status in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is the only major part of Western Europe without a National Park. The legislation would further protect and enhance the landscape quality, bio-diversity and culture of an area, provide an internationally recognised tourism brand and empower local communities. The economic impact of designation is potentially significant, for example, it is estimated that designation of a Mourne National Park could result in an additional £81m per annum in tourism revenue and result in over 2,000 jobs in the park and its hinterland. The impact on the economy could be significant; research has shown that the three National Parks in Wales contributes £205 million to GDP.



Renewable Energy Support Bill

No primary legislation on renewable energy policy exists in Northern Ireland. The introduction of the Energy Act 2008 in Great Britain, and several other complementary pieces of legislation enacted or proposed either in GB or in the Republic of Ireland, has resulted in a framework in Northern Ireland that cannot adequately compete in attracting investment in renewable energy. Legislation is therefore required in Northern Ireland to address issues of security of energy supply and create a competitive framework for the development of a vibrant and competitive renewable energy sector. The Executive must provide a clear statement of intent that Northern Ireland is open for renewable energy business. Research completed by the Carbon Trust indicates, that with high level of investment and the development of renewables, there is the potential to create more than half a million jobs in the UK, with between 8,470 and 33,124 jobs in Northern Ireland. The Bill could include the following: the introduction of feed in tariffs and renewable heat incentives; provision for permitted development for both domestic and certain non-domestic renewable installations; the creation of the framework for the introduction of smart metering; and the introduction of a development framework for geothermal energy.

... Northern Ireland has an obligation to contribute toward reducing emissions...

Protecting our environment

NI Climate Change Bill

This legislation would commit Northern Ireland to making a fair and proportionate contribution to the UK Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets required under the UK Climate Change Act. It will make addressing climate change a core national priority and an objective for all Ministers to take account of. There is strong support from a cross-section of stakeholders on the need for clarity on climate change duties and responsibilities. Through the UK-wide Climate Change Act 2008 and the commitment by the UK to contribute toward the EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009, Northern Ireland has an obligation to contribute toward reducing emissions and energy diversification. However, the targets currently in place in Northern Ireland and the legal framework are insufficient to effectively deliver upon these commitments. Without legislation the opportunities to protect households and businesses and to reap economic and employment benefits will be limited.

Northern Ireland Marine Bill

Northern Ireland is covered by certain provisions of the UK-wide Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. This Act governs matters beyond Northern Ireland's immediate territorial waters (i.e. beyond 12 nautical miles). In addition responsibility for our marine environment is spread across a large number of government departments. As a consequence many of our most diverse marine sites such as Rathlin Island, Belfast Lough and Strangford Lough continue to be damaged; the State of the Sea Report 2011 clearly defines the issue. Failure to legislate and maintain best practice with other regions could result in further damage to the environment and missed opportunities for the development of renewable energy in the absence of clarity on the regulatory framework. The Bill may include the establishment of a NI Marine Management Organisation and a more expedient and coherent approach to the development of marine plans and marine protected areas.



Leading change means being prepared to take the tough decisions, to tackle the big issues.

Ensuring opportunity for all and protecting the vulnerable

Single Equality Bill

This Bill will harmonise existing equality and anti-discrimination measures and update and strengthen equality provisions in Northern Ireland. It will address a number of urgent areas including amendment of race equality legislation to cover colour and nationality alongside race and ethnic origin; the extension of age-discrimination laws to non-employment areas; stronger duties on public bodies in relation to gender equality legislation; and addressing inconsistencies in disability equality legislation.

This Bill would also revise Fair Employment monitoring to better reflect the diversity of mixed and multiple identities within Northern Ireland. A consultation exercise around a potential Single Equality Bill in 2004 has not been followed through under devolution and updates to legislation have been piecemeal. The introduction of the Equality Act (2010) in Great Britain means that in certain areas our legislation lags behind best practice.

Adoption Bill

This Bill would provide a long overdue update of Adoption Law in Northern Ireland. The law in Northern Ireland has now fallen behind the rest of the UK and potentially out of step with various pieces of recent domestic equality legislation and European Conventions. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has not followed through on the outcome of its 2006 consultation "Adopting the Future". Currently the care system does not provide enough looked after children with the chance for permanence. There are around 2,500 children and young people in care in Northern Ireland. This updated bill would ensure uniformity across statutory agencies; set clear standards in terms of quality; put in place eligibility criteria that reflects the norms of modern society; place the child at the centre of the process; recognise the needs of those involved in adoption; and establish a full range of options for permanent families.

Apartment Developments' Management Reform Bill

This bill would address current inadequacies in the laws governing aspects of the ownership of certain types of private properties which comprise part of multi-unit developments (including privately owned apartments and so-called 'Townhouses'). There are an estimated 42,000 private dwellings that are part of private multi-unit developments in Northern Ireland. Such multi-unit developments contain designated Common Areas. Often the management of these areas falls below the standard required and owners have found it difficult to find a legal remedy. This bill would clarify ownership and management issues for residents and owners.

Providing innovative health solutions

Minimum Pricing of Alcohol

This Bill would establish a minimum price per unit of alcohol. For example, setting a minimum unit of 50p per unit would mean that after a decade there would be almost 3,000 fewer deaths every year and 41,000 fewer cases of chronic illness in the UK. Research has shown that the costs of alcohol in Northern Ireland are significant, estimated to be between £500million and £884million. The cost to the Health Service alone may be as high as around £160million each year with a further cost of £82million to Social Services. The research indicated that the cost to Fire and Police Services is in excess of £250 million and Courts and Prisons £100 million. There is a particular problem with alcohol being readily available at relatively low cost through supermarkets.

Single Mental Health and Mental Capacity Bill

This Bill would implement a key aspect of the Bamford Review on Mental Health and Learning Disability. Rather than passing two separate bills dealing with mental capacity and mental health, there are considerable advantages from a single, integrated piece of legislation. Northern Ireland has the opportunity to become a world leader in this respect. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety conducted a consultation on these issues in 2009 on the assumption of two separate bills, but it has now accepted the principle of a single bill. The key principle will be that of 'autonomy' allowing individuals with mental capacity the freedom to make their own decisions.

This list is not exhaustive. There are other routine pieces of legislation such as two Budget Bills which need to be passed every year. Furthermore, there may be other areas in which legislative action would be required over the forthcoming four years.

allianceparty.org

88 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HE

Telephone 028 9032 4274

Fax 028 9033 3147

Email alliance@allianceparty.org



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