



Alliance Works

Better is Possible

Alliance Party
Local Government
Manifesto 2023



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LEADER'S FOREWORD

ALLIANCE WORKS.

A year ago, we secured our place as the third largest party in Northern Ireland following a stunning Assembly election which resulted in the election of 17 MLAs.

Unfortunately, the endless cycle of ransom politics used by those parties who prefer to distract and divide rather than to deliver has prevented progress once again, and we've been without a functioning government for over a year.

Back in 2019, we also faced council elections with no functioning Stormont and we elected more Alliance councillors to more councils than ever before. This May, you have an opportunity to send that message loud and clear once again: that you deserve an Executive and Assembly that works.

Like you, we're focussed on what really matters: improving health and education; protecting our environment; delivering accessible transport and safer streets. We want a society that works for us and empowers us all to achieve our potential.

Alliance's record in local government is strong: driving openness and transparency; challenging sectarian carve-ups; promoting a shared society, diversity, good relations and equality; supporting economic development; protecting our environment; and creating safer, stronger communities.

That delivery is underpinned by our commitment to ensuring value for money, so you can have confidence that your money and council resources are used as efficiently as possible.

In these council elections it is crucial that we focus on ensuring that a tier of government which is currently working continues to deliver, and that we increase the influence of Alliance across local government.

In this manifesto, we have focused specifically on those matters on which local government has direct control or influence. This isn't a stand-alone document – to get the fullest picture of how Alliance plans to work for you, it should be read in conjunction with our Assembly and Westminster manifestos and our other recent policy publications on institutional reform, the cost-of-living crisis and health transformation.

Your vote can elect more Alliance councillors who are focused on what matters to you. Who will work for you.

If you want politics that works, then vote Alliance on 18th May. Alliance works.

Naomi Long MLA

Leader of the Alliance Party





CREATING SHARED AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES, WITH A FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND MUTUAL RESPECT

Shared Future

Alliance believes that council decision-making should promote co-operation and integration, rather than division and separation, to ensure our council areas are open and accessible to everyone.

We want to see:

- The maintenance of existing shared spaces, ensuring that council facilities are open to all sections of the community. This will help break down divisions and reduce the need for duplication of services.
- “Shared future-proofing” of new council decisions. This would involve an analysis of whether a council policy or decision harms or helps our move towards integration.
- Improved connectivity within and between rural and urban areas to enable a stronger and more diverse wider community.

Equality and Diversity

Alliance will promote equality for all, irrespective of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief, race or ethnicity, and political opinion.

We want to see:

- Council facilities that are accessible to all and councils working with businesses to provide access for all.
- Changing Places toilets included in all council properties.
- Council communications provided in alternative formats, and the provision of sign language in public-facing council facilities.
- Public realm works delivering full accessibility in all areas including footpaths, dropped kerbs, and road crossings. This should be done through co-production and co-design with service-users.
- Autism, ADHD and learning disability-friendly services provided in council facilities and awareness promoted amongst council staff.



- Effective and meaningful consultation between the council and all residents and stakeholders, paying particular attention to section 75 groups and newcomers, recognising the practical and cultural barriers to doing so.
- Increased participation in public life of people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, women and ethnic minorities.
- Consideration of how best to develop or strengthen Traveller Forums, to consider issues relating to Travellers, including accommodation.
- Support for businesses that provide sustainable employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Councils implementing carer-friendly workplace policies and supporting staff with unpaid caring roles.
- Councils marking Pride in their area and becoming accredited Stonewall Diversity Champions.

Shared Spaces

Alliance believes that councils should support, encourage and enable local arts, leisure and social events and activities, and should provide well-designed public spaces that reflect the needs of residents.

We want to see:

- Councils taking the lead in developing events and festival programmes that celebrate diversity, revitalise town centres, support tourism and encourage the creative industries.
- High-quality, modern and affordable leisure facilities, including play parks, leisure centres and other recreational facilities.
- Sustainable funding for the arts sector and development programmes for cultural and arts organisations.
- Mitigations for the negative impacts of road closure legislation on community events.
- Bonfire regulation that facilitates community traditions in a safe, respectful and lawful manner.
- Provision for dual language street signage in line with best practice and international standards, where demand from local residents is demonstrated through transparent council procedures.
- Councils naming facilities in a way that recognises local connections without political posturing: reflecting locality but maintaining neutrality.



DELIVERING A GREEN NEW DEAL FOR COUNCILS, SPEARHEADING CHANGE WITH SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND REGENERATION

Leading Change

Climate Change poses enormous challenges for us all, but it also brings opportunities for local government to drive change, lowering emissions and council running costs in the process.

Alliance councillors will be local environmental leaders. We want to see councils become carbon neutral, recognising their responsibility to lead the way in sustainability and recycling, and set an example for other businesses and households in the district to follow.

We want to see:

- A Green New Deal for each council.
- Councils protecting and increasing our green spaces and woodland, and adopting ambitious biodiversity targets.
- Newly built council facilities to be carbon neutral, and for existing infrastructure such as car parks and older buildings to be used to generate renewable energy.
- A circular economy within council areas, mainstreaming innovation, such as reuse and repair projects and deposit return schemes, to maximise recycling rates and minimise the use of plastics.
- Councils becoming Living Wage Employers and using the procurement process to reduce supply chain emissions, incentivise carbon reduction and serve the public good.
- The electrification of council vehicle fleets.

Sustainability and Recycling

Reducing plastic use and carbon emissions and improving recycling rates are essential to protecting our environment. Despite improvements in recent years, recycling rates remain low across Northern Ireland.

We want to see:

- Councils making recycling as easy as possible for people, taking into account access to transport and mobility needs.
- Co-ordination of waste management across and within council areas, and removing confusing rules and barriers to recycling in order to provide a standardised and accessible service to rate-payers and to drive up recycling rates.
- Councils moving away from co-mingled recycling systems.
- Council facilities ending their use of single-use plastics and considering how they can incentivise businesses in their areas to do the same.
- Council recycling centres functioning as drop-off points for household items to be donated or refurbished for onward use.



Sustainable Transport

Alliance believes we need clean, accessible transport that works for our communities, our environment and our economy.

We want to see:

- Councils becoming leaders in sustainable transport, ensuring meeting venues are as accessible as possible by public transport and that council parks and land enable active travel.
- The promotion and expansion of park and ride facilities and the development of low traffic neighbourhoods.
- Councils given responsibility for on-street parking so that they can take a more strategic approach to the provision of disabled parking bays and electric car charge points, as well as on issues around problem parking.
- Councils working with the Department for Infrastructure and Translink to improve lighting and safety at all rural bus stops to enable and encourage residents to access and use public transport as an alternative to car use.

Active Travel

Alliance is fully committed to the delivery of active travel options for the people of Northern Ireland, and to realising the multiple health, environmental, social and economic benefits of cycling in particular.

We want to see:

- Councils promoting policies to drive down car use in town centres and create pedestrianisation schemes, where viable.
- Councils working with the Department for Infrastructure to deliver safe and convenient cycling lanes.
- Publicly accessible maps showing 'rights of way' in council areas.
- The development and realisation of the health, rural regeneration, and tourism potential of greenways across the region, with connectivity to the rest of the island where possible.
- Secured public cycle parking areas and hire bikes prioritised in all major towns, close to or in public transport hubs.





BUILDING VIBRANT AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES, MAXIMISING THE POTENTIAL THAT EVERY COUNCIL AREA HAS TO OFFER

Business and Tourism

Alliance believes that we need to support local businesses in order to generate our own wealth, create local jobs and build a thriving local economy.

We want to see:

- New and innovative models of funding and investment to our cities, towns and villages, regenerating our town centres and supporting local business associations.
 - The development of hubs within council areas, using community planning to link small businesses and social enterprises with further education colleges.
 - An integrated strategy for sustainable tourism, which recognises local strengths and assets that can be developed and projected to a wider audience.
 - Councils acting as a central directory of tourism, hospitality and entertainment attractions in their area, including providing advice and information on accessibility.
 - An independent review of the non-domestic rating system with a specific focus on how to better support local businesses, renewable energy, start-ups and SMEs.
 - The continued collaboration between councils and partners in Labour Market Partnerships.
- Value for money in the delivery of city deals.
 - Councils maximising opportunities for social enterprises.
 - A formal mechanism so that local businesses have a voice in the community planning process.
 - Councils appointing Prompt Payment Champions to ensure the prompt payment of invoices is prioritised and that targets are met.
 - The development of Business Improvement Districts, whereby businesses fund regeneration in their area through a levy on business rates.
 - Town centres, rather than out-of-town retail centres, prioritised as the preferred sites for retail and business development.

Regeneration

We believe that local councils are best placed to deliver local solutions for town, city and area-based regeneration.

We want to see regeneration powers urgently devolved to councils and their use monitored thereafter.

Councils should become “one-stop-shops” for regeneration and development, ensuring that targeting social need is central in decision-making.

Planning

Eight years after planning was devolved to Councils it is important to reflect that this was the most significant power passed to Local Government since reform back in 1973. Since then, the function has bedded in but with varied success.

Rather than taking the originally anticipated timescale of three and a half years, Local Development Plans are now envisaged to take at least 13 years, with 2028 considered an ambitious end date.

Accountability measures for the Planning Appeals Commission are also lacking, targets for processing of applications are being routinely missed, and those raising environmental and other concerns are denied the third party right of appeal.

Alongside action at a regional level through the Department for Infrastructure, at a Local Government level Alliance wants to see:

- Decisions made based on the evidence and the votes of all members of planning committees recorded and published online.
- Full digitisation of the planning process in an accessible manner, from pre-application consultation to processing of the application and any appeals arising.

- Local Development Plans developed in line with net zero obligations and encouraging shared communities, with mixed-tenure, affordable housing developments.
- Better connectivity to active travel and public transport for homes and businesses, by better utilising planning conditions and developer contributions in planning applications for new developments.
- The introduction of a minimum threshold for social and affordable homes in major housing developments.
- Expedited consideration of new renewable energy infrastructure including electric vehicle charging, battery energy storage and both on and offshore wind.
- Localised action plans to ensure the swifter turnaround of planning applications.
- Local Government playing an active part in the process of planning reform following publication of the Department for Infrastructure Review of 2011 Planning Act, NI Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee Reports on Planning in Northern Ireland, transforming culture and processes to ensure better and quicker outcomes.





STRENGTHENING PUBLIC TRUST AND ENSURING OPENNESS, TRANSPARENCY AND VALUE FOR MONEY IN ALL COUNCIL OPERATIONS

Value for Money

Alliance councillors want to deliver better value for money for everyone across Northern Ireland. Better value for money is about how we spend your money, using it to benefit everyone in the community and in a way that supports the best possible outcomes.

Better value for money is not as simple as saving money, as sometimes investment is necessary to deliver that value.

For example:

- Investing in solar panels on council buildings will provide an environmental benefit for future generations, as well as saving councils money on energy costs.
- Delivering transparency through live-streaming or recording and publishing council meetings may incur a cost, but it is fundamental in ensuring rate-payers' money is spent responsibly.
- Investing in schemes to improve connectivity between rural and urban areas, and spending money to carry out meaningful consultations with communities on council projects might have an additional cost, but the benefits are community cohesion and better service provision.

The current estimates of the cost of division range between £400m and £830m annually.

By investing in facilities that are shared and accessible for everyone, we can remove the need for duplication, as well as providing better services.

Transparency

Alliance stands for open, transparent and accountable politics, at all levels of government.

We want to see:

- All council minutes and audio records available online, including sub-committees and working groups.
- Webcasts of full council meetings.
- Councillor expense claim forms, declaration of interest forms and attendance statistics on council websites.

We will push for the consistent use of standing orders in council meetings and for debate that is fair and respectful.

We would also welcome a review into the oversight arrangements for councils, including scrutiny of spending on capital projects, and the powers of the Department for Communities.



Funding

Councils have a vital role in administering and providing funding streams that can invigorate local economies and provide opportunities for communities.

We want to see:

- An end to any party-political carve-ups of funding streams and unaccountable allocations of large sums of rate-payers' money by improving transparency and capping ad hoc funding streams.
- Funding decisions made via open applications, with clear criteria and measurable objectives, and properly screened for equality, shared future and rural impact.





DEVELOPING STRONGER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES, WHERE THE WELL-BEING OF RESIDENTS IS A TOP PRIORITY

Community Planning

Alliance believes that councils are at the centre of our communities. They should use their community planning powers to ensure that public services work together to deliver for local people, joining up the different tiers of government.

We want to see:

- Community planning that always supports and promotes sharing, sustainability and the environment.
- Councils working with the Executive and the health and social care sector to influence and communicate policy changes that will benefit the community.
- The integration of community transport and public transport options in rural areas in particular.
- Audits of council services to assess how councils contribute to homelessness prevention and to consider further actions that councils can take.
- Councils considering ambitious and creative ways to produce the outcomes promised in community plans, working across government and with social enterprises and development trusts.

Community Wellbeing

Alliance believes that council service provision must have the well-being of communities at its heart in order to improve the lives of residents and develop vibrant and welcoming communities.

We want to see:

- Increased park and play provision, including dog-friendly areas and outdoor gyms.
- Longer opening hours for parks and play areas, especially in the darker winter months, with appropriate lighting to ensure people feel safe using them.
- Councils developing community trail plans and helping to fund and support community trails.
- Provision for one free leisure activity a year for each person in the council area.
- Fair charges for the use of council facilities.
- Community childcare provision supported, and council summer schemes expanded.
- Support for senior citizens' groups and council services that work to eradicate loneliness and isolation.
- Councils tying in with GP federations and primary care hubs to promote well-being and healthy lifestyles.
- Adequate allotment provision that matches demand.
- An improved range of leisure activities available to young people, ensuring all young people have access to youth provision, especially those who may not traditionally engage with council services.
- Shadow youth councils in each area, so that young people can help shape council policies and provide a channel to councils on the issues that affect them most.

- Support for schemes that ensure council facilities are safe, welcoming, and accessible for all, including:
 - Breastfeeding Welcome – schemes should be advertised widely and councils should work with local business organisations to directly facilitate public breastfeeding.
 - Women’s Aid Safe Places – council facilities should be ‘Safe Places’ where staff are aware of domestic violence and can signpost victims to appropriate services.
 - Dementia Friendly Communities – councils should take a lead in ensuring people suffering from dementia feel included and involved in their community and are able to lead fulfilling and independent lives, as far as possible and for as long as possible.
 - Parent Champions – councils should promise to seek the opinion of parents explicitly when consulting on services for children and young people.

Community Safety

Alliance has a strong commitment to the rule of law and believes that a shared future can only happen when local communities feel connected to and confident in their police service.

We want to see:

- Councils implementing a zero-tolerance approach towards paramilitaries and community gatekeepers, and consulting with communities, rather than just community organisations.
- Councils adopting a protocol for engagement with those associated with paramilitary organisations.
- Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) that are reflective of local communities, are responsive to local needs and that play a vital role in building relationships with police at a local level.

Animal Welfare

Alliance has always prioritised animal welfare and sought to tackle cruelty against animals. People engaged in animal cruelty are not only a danger to the animals involved, but potentially to society as a whole.

We believe councils have a vital role to play in animal welfare.

We want to see:

- Councils using silent fireworks in council-sponsored displays and raising awareness of the animal welfare risks around fireworks.
- A zero-tolerance approach to illegal puppy breeding and increased enforcement in this regard.
- Reduced use of unnecessary dog euthanasia in council kennelling facilities through better partnerships with third sector shelters and sanctuaries to rehome unwanted dogs.
- A robust inspection regime for registered dog breeding facilities to ensure the highest possible welfare standards.



Alliance

Alliance Party Local Government Manifesto 2023

Party Headquarters

7 Farnley Road, Newtownabbey, BT36 7TY

☎ 028 9032 4274

✉ alliance@allianceparty.org

🐦 <https://twitter.com/allianceparty>

📘 www.facebook.com/alliancepartyni

www.allianceparty.org