Contents

Message from David Ford 3
Key Policy Commitments for the Assembly 5
An Economic Revolution 11
Building a Shared Future 25
Delivering Sound Public Finances 37
Skills – Investing in our future 47
Creating a First Class Education System 63
Justice and Community Safety 73
A Healthier Society 81
Tackling Poverty & Social Exclusion 95
Creating a Quality Environment 105
Delivering a Green New Deal 111
Providing Sustainable Transport Solutions 117
Agriculture and Rural Development 123
Culture, Arts & Leisure 129
Good Governance 135
Leading Change for Stronger Local Government 141
Looking Outward 145
Message from 
David Ford

I am pleased to introduce the Alliance Manifesto for the 2011 Assembly Election. This is the most detailed manifesto ever issued by any party in the history of Northern Ireland.

This reflects the reality that is an election to a working devolved Assembly, with control over a wide range of economic, social, environmental and justice issues. We want to be clear with the electorate where we stand across a wide range of policy areas.

Alliance is contesting this election as a party of government with the aspiration, not only to continue to play a role in government, but to expand our presence and influence.

For 40 years Alliance has led change. We have been to the forefront of standing up for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We have pioneered power-sharing and integrated education, and been the staunchest and clearest advocates of building a shared future.

Today Alliance is at the forefront of the transformation of Northern Ireland. We are working to achieve a fair, shared and prosperous Northern Ireland, with a modern economy, adequate job opportunities, well-funded and modern public services, safe communities and a clean, green environment. We want to make government work better for the common good of all the people of this society.

Alliance is leading the policy debates on a wide range of issues, including integrating education, strengthening the economy, promoting skills as a key economic driver, addressing health inequalities, creating a fair and responsive justice system and protecting the environment.

Rising above the unionist-nationalist divide, we welcome people from all backgrounds and respect every person as an individual. We see Northern Ireland as a confident, outward looking region, building relations within the UK, with other devolved regions, on a north-south basis, in Europe and internationally.

Over the past year, Alliance has made massive breakthroughs. Naomi Long broke the mould of local politics through becoming Alliance’s first elected Member of Parliament. I was also elected as the Assembly’s first Justice Minister, and over the past twelve months, Alliance has demonstrated what we can do when entrusted with the responsibility of government.

With an even stronger mandate, Alliance would have the opportunity to put many of the ideas and commitments contained in this manifesto into practice.

David Ford  Alliance Leader
Key Policy Commitments for the Assembly

**Leading Change... for a Shared Future**
- Achieve 20% of children in integrated schools and 40% in mixed schools by 2020
- Make it law that the Housing Executive encourages and facilitates mixed housing
- Require public bodies to promote shared space in new capital projects
- Cease tolerance of illegally-erected flags and emblems
- Work with communities to secure the removal of ‘peace walls’
- End the sectarian designation system for MLAs in the Assembly
- Require Departments to review Spending Plans to identify the costs of managing a divided society by the end of the 2011-12 financial year
- Pass a Single Equality Bill by the end of 2012
- Deliver and implement a Sexual Orientation Strategy
- Strengthen the Community Relations Council as an independent watchdog
- Secure cross-party agreement on a mechanism for dealing with the past
- Introduce a Comprehensive Languages Act

**Leading Change... for Better Government**
- Create an Executive formed through negotiation, that operates to an agreed Programme
- Reduce Government Departments from 12 to 8
- Reduce the number of MLAs to 80
- Place a duty to co-operate on all Departments
- Deliver on the Review of Public Administration – reducing the number of councils
- Convene talks between political and local government to develop consensus and a roadmap for the future structure of councils
- Create a partnership model between regional and local government.
- Introduce transparency around political donations
Leading Change... for an Economic Revolution

✔ Create a Department for the Economy
✔ Introduce a lower rate of corporation tax
✔ Develop a targeted approach to inward investment
✔ Rationalise and better target business support
✔ Re-direct resources from revenue budgets to capital to support the construction sector
✔ Explore the possibility of creating a commercially orientated research organisation
✔ Develop incubation centres to support high growth indigenous business
✔ Ensure a range of finance opportunities for small business
✔ Protect and enhance our town centres
✔ Invest in the Green New Deal
✔ Grow our key sectors: agri-foods, creative industries, ICT and tourism
✔ Promote our culture, heritage and environment and designate the Mournes a National Park

Leading Change... for Modern Public Services

✔ Redirect funding and service delivery to early intervention and prevention measures
✔ Benchmark and market-test public services to ensure value for money
✔ Reduce administration costs and waste to ensure that resources are directed to the frontline
✔ Promote greater provision of shared services on a north-south basis
✔ Work for the Mutualisation of Northern Ireland Water
✔ Provide a joined up approach to planning and urban regeneration
✔ Introduce a cross departmental approach to community transport needs
Leading Change... for a Safer Community
✔ Ensure adequate resources and an Executive wide focus on addressing paramilitarism
✔ Tackle organised crime
✔ Reduce offending and re-offending via an inter agency approach
✔ Make communities safer, through a new Community Safety Strategy
✔ Develop a more consistent approach to sentencing
✔ Improve access to justice, through a reform of legal aid
✔ Recognise and address the needs of victims and survivors
✔ Reform the prison system

Leading Change... for Health and Well-being
✔ Promote a cross-party working group to discuss and agree major reforms with the health service
✔ Ensure a better focus on public health, prevention and early intervention to improve health outcomes, address health inequalities and to save money
✔ Provide a greater emphasis upon better home and community services
✔ Increase funding for mental health services and deliver integrated mental health and mental capacity legislation
✔ Tackle bureaucracy and develop cross border co-operation to save money to protect vital services
✔ Introduce minimum pricing of alcohol
Leading Change... for a Fairer Society
✓ Target spending toward need
✓ Ensure that taxes and charges are fair and progressive
✓ Support a welfare system that enables people to fulfil their potential
✓ Develop an inter-agency ‘total place’ approach to inactivity and unemployment
✓ Invest in early years’ education and childcare to support child development
✓ Support early intervention and prevention for families and young people at risk
✓ Reduce the number of looked after children
✓ Provide social housing
✓ Support access to services for rural communities
✓ Introduce social clauses in public sector capital projects

Leading Change... for a Greener Future
✓ Create green clean energy sources
✓ Work to reduce energy use in homes, businesses and government
✓ Develop a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland, supported by a clear ‘road map’
✓ Create an independent Environment Protection Agency
✓ Commit to a carbon neutral public sector estate
✓ Protect the marine environment
✓ Development a comprehensive animal and plant disease management strategy
✓ Protect and enhance our built and natural environment
✓ Introduce third party right to appeal
✓ Develop a sustainable approach to urban planning
✓ Provide a more sustainable public transport
Leading Change... for Education and Skills

✔ Encourage ‘wrap around’ full-time nursery provision
✔ Rebalance the education budget, toward early and primary education
✔ Promote local area planning and sustainable schools
✔ Address inefficiencies in school estate to direct funding toward pupils
✔ Provide an education system that reflects the individual learning needs of pupils
✔ Retain legal statementing for special needs students
✔ Work to address poor levels of literacy and numeracy
✔ Retain government as the primary funder of higher education teaching
✔ No unfair rises in tuition fees
✔ Reduce the number of year one drop outs from university
✔ Develop stronger routes of progression between our universities and colleges
✔ Designate STEM subjects as priority skills areas and improve provision in schools
✔ Create a more flexible and responsive training and education system
✔ Stimulate employer investment in the skills of the workforce
✔ Develop strong links between employers and our education and skills providers
✔ Provide accessible, informed and independent careers advice
✔ Implement an early intervention and prevention strategy to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training
Leading change on legislation...

for a Shared Future
✔ Shared Housing Bill
✔ Comprehensive Languages Bill
✔ Shared Future Policy Proofing
✔ Single Equality Bill

or an Economic Revolution
✔ Enabling Bill for Corporation Tax
✔ National Park Bill
✔ Renewable Energy Support Bill

for Education and Skills
✔ Early Education and Care Bill
✔ Shared and Integrated Education Bill
✔ Education and Skills Authority Bill

for Modern Public Services
✔ NI Water Governance Bill
✔ A Bill to Create an Independent Environment Protection Agency
✔ Winter Gritting Bill

for Health and Well-being
✔ Minimum Pricing of Alcohol
✔ Single Mental Health and Mental Capacity Bill

for Better Government
✔ Governance Bill
✔ Local Government Review of Public Administration Bill

for a Safer Community
✔ Faster, Fairer Justice Bill
✔ Justice Miscellaneous Provision Bill
✔ Biometric Data Retention Reform Bill

for a Fairer Society
✔ Adoption Bill
✔ Apartment Developments’ Management Reform Bill

for a Greener Future
✔ NI Climate Change Bill
✔ Northern Ireland Marine Bill
✔ An Economic Revolution
An Economic Revolution

The Alliance Party wants to grow the private sector in Northern Ireland, generating wealth and increasing employment opportunities for all members of society. We want to ensure that our economy is strengthened through the development of a strong export focus, with companies that can compete on an international stage.

The current economic climate makes this a challenging task. However, we believe that the people of Northern Ireland – our entrepreneurs, business leaders and workforce – have the ability to meet this challenge. The Alliance Party will promote policies and initiatives that provide Northern Ireland with the best opportunities to achieve this aspiration.

Alliance favours a strong and open economy, in which the primacy of market solutions is balanced by both government and public concern for social justice. The role of government 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.

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 this spectrum, with approximately 40% of public spending covered by a financial transfer from the rest of the UK. This overall imbalance is unsustainable in that it skews the housing market, places undue pressure on public services and distorts the labour market.

Over recent years, the Republic of Ireland has seen significant economic changes including a strong track record of inward investment. Despite the collapse of the banking system, the turmoil within its public finances, and the shrinking of its economy, Ireland retains a skilled workforce, a quality infrastructure and a continued profile in inward investment which allows it to maintain a competitive advantage relative to Northern Ireland.

By contrast, the local economy is underperforming. Rates of long-term unemployment and the number of people outside the labour market are too high. Levels of job creation levels are too low, with too many young people failing to reach their full potential. We have below average levels of productivity and wealth creation, plus an over-reliance on the public sector.

These challenges have been compounded by the recent global economic recession, the reductions in public expenditure across the UK, increased competition, and the rebalancing of the global economy towards Asia in general and the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) specifically.
Alliance believes that despite the challenges facing the economy, Northern Ireland has the resources to emerge from this period of austerity stronger and more competitive. We have an enterprising and resilient business base; a youthful and well educated population; a strong manufacturing base; excellent research and innovation attributes; a world class telecommunications network; strong international links; and unique natural and cultural resources. Our strengths far outweigh our weaknesses. Developing policies that exploit these strengths will create the right conditions for growth and address many of the weaknesses currently inherent in our economy.

To achieve this, our Assembly must work harder and smarter. Departments and Ministers must co-operate in a strategic way to address the underlying problems of our economy and realise opportunities. Entrepreneurship and risk must be supported and rewarded, our resources should be sustainably managed and all members of our society should have access to training and employment opportunities that allow them to reach their full potential. Government, businesses and education providers must work together.

Our detailed proposals, later in this manifesto, on securing and improving public sector finances and changes to the size and shape of government are essential aspects in ensuring sustained economic growth through better Government.

Leadership and commitment must be provided, signalling that Northern Ireland is open for business. Alliance argues that investment in economic recovery and transformation must be a top priority for the Executive and Assembly. We are the only party that can work for all of Northern Ireland, by focusing on the policies that will create a stronger and more prosperous region.

Alliance is committed to supporting an economic revolution.

**A Strong Economic Strategy**

We cannot look exclusively to Westminster to solve our economic challenges. Many of the key economic drivers: enterprise, skills innovation, and infrastructure that are vital to securing our economic recovery are controlled by the local Assembly.
Our approach to achieving an economic revolution requires a renewed focus across government and the private sector. It is vital that government provides leadership, facilitating investment, building upon the competitiveness of local business and encouraging growth.

**Alliance calls for the development of a Department for the Economy as part of a comprehensive restructuring of Government.** This would better promote the needs of business, highlight barriers to business creation and growth and ensure joined-up working.

**Alliance will develop a robust inter-departmental economic strategy.** Without a challenging strategy, government spending cannot be targeted effectively and we will miss the opportunity to create a more prosperous society. This strategy should focus on job protection and creation in the short-term as well as set out a clear long-term strategy for increasing productivity and competitiveness that builds on our key strengths. It should also benchmark Northern Ireland against international best practice. Alliance will work to ensure that a new economic strategy is in place before the end of 2011. Ongoing delay in this area is unacceptable. A key element of this strategy must be the creation and distribution of wealth.

**Alliance will continue to actively challenge the current lack of a UK-wide regional policy.** More economic activity, in particular high productivity enterprises, needs to be encouraged in Northern Ireland and the other dependent regions of the UK.

**Alliance will continue to argue that the Assembly be granted tax-varying powers.** It is important to ensure that any Government 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. At present, the level of the Block Grant is set independently of the relative economic performance of the Northern Ireland economy, meaning that the Assembly has no direct incentive to prioritise the economy. This power is central to the introduction of a lower rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland, which is discussed below.

**Alliance will prioritise the creation of employment opportunities within the new Assembly.** Time must not be lost in providing employment for those affected by the down turn in the economy.

**Supporting Private Sector Investment and Growth**

**Government as a facilitator of change**

**Alliance will work to develop improved collaboration between government and local business.** Best practice suggests that the step change required to grow our economy and create jobs will only occur when the public and private sectors work together. We would amend the membership of the Economic Advisory Group and strengthen the role of the Cross Sectoral Advisory Group to ensure that it includes representation from the key business organisations in Northern Ireland – many of their representatives have shown leadership in producing detail on how jobs and wealth can be created.

**Alliance will lobby the UK government to designate Northern Ireland as an Enterprise Zone.** This zone should deliver the conditions that are favourable for economic growth. The Assembly must take the lead in demonstrating to Westminster the conditions and incentives required that are specific to our economy, such as corporation tax, a simplified tax credit system, access to finance, the creation of a jobs fund, an enhanced export guarantee scheme to promote export lead manufacturing and a simplified tax credit system for innovation, training and export.
Alliance will continue to work to ensure that all revenue neutral drivers are implemented by Departments. The Government also has at its disposal a number of revenue neutral drivers that could encourage private sector investment and support the creation of jobs. Our call for institutional reform as detailed in the Good Governance section of this manifesto is essential in creating the right environment for business. Revenue neutral drivers include:

**Alliance will seek to reduce needless regulations and bureaucracy for small businesses.** Obstacles that unnecessarily impede growth must be minimised. The development of a pro-enterprise panel should be considered, this panel would actively encourage feedback on government rules and regulations that act as a barrier to business development and entrepreneurship.

**Alliance would open up the planning service to benchmarking.** The planning service must be more responsive with faster processing times to provide certainty and allow for timely decision making.

**Alliance would use public procurement to support the growth of the local private sector and create jobs.** Public procurement is worth approximately £3 billion per year. It is vital that an intelligent approach to procurement is used to provide a level playing field for local companies, particularly SMEs and new business starts.

**Maximising our economic levers**
In addition to making the case for a reduction in corporation tax and a more co-ordinated approach to support and grow enterprise, we need to ensure continued investment across policy areas that have an impact on economic growth, e.g. capital investment, energy infrastructure, education and skills and research and development. It is vital that all these policy levers are working to support economic growth.

**Alliance is committed to ensuring that we fulfil our skills potential.**
The development of a robust skills policy is key to growing and rebalancing our economy. The skills held by a population have an impact on the competitiveness and growth of a country and are vital in addressing social inequalities. A highly skilled workforce is also an attractive proposition for inward investors and is central in ensuring that our local businesses are competitive on an international stage. It is vital that the skills offered match the needs of businesses.

Alliance believes that unless we invest in the up-skilling of our workforce we will not be able to sustain an economic recovery. **Alliance will work for the transformation of the skills landscape.** Alliance policies on skills are set out later in this manifesto.

**Alliance is committed to encouraging and facilitating research and development.**
Research and development (R&D) leading to the commercialisation of ideas is central to developing a competitive economy and generating wealth. Significant funding already exists in this area, it is vital that this investment works for the economy. R&D policies must be outcome rather than input driven with funding leading to the commercialisation of ideas or products and the granting of licences, patents and intellectual property rights. Success must be measured on the return that it generates rather than the level of monies invested. **Alliance supports a realignment of the Invest NI strategy to support investment in businesses and projects with a high degree of innovation and R&D content.**
Alliance calls for the exploration of a commercially orientated research organisation. The promotion of public, private, education partnerships are required to ensure there is a strong focus on the practical application of research. These partnerships should be industry led. Alliance supports the promotion of Knowledge Transfer Partnership between businesses and higher and further education. The sharing of expertise and knowledge is vital in supporting the increased competitiveness of our businesses.

Alliance will work to rationalise the innovation funding landscape to ensure both clarity for business and reduce administration costs. In addition the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI should ensure that they maximise funding from the EU Seventh Framework Programme (SP7) to fund R&D and innovation.

Alliance will continue to invest in our economic infrastructure. Continued investment in Northern Ireland’s infrastructure is critical to the future development of the economy. There is also the added benefit of the creation of employment opportunities for our struggling construction sector. This is a major element of the Northern Ireland economy and has suffered most from the recent recession. It is vital that the objective of developing a shared future is paramount in investment decisions. We are committed to considering the transfer of funding from current to capital over the lifetime of the Assembly as additional revenue becomes available through monitoring rounds or as a result of Barnett consequentials. Any reallocation of resources should be conducted across the Executive rather than just within individual Departments in order to facilitate this strategic approach.

Within this current funding environment there are a number of key infrastructure developments that we are committed to supporting, including: Joint Training College at Desertcreat, Cookstown; the ongoing work of the ILEX corporation in Derry; the construction of the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin; prioritisation of the A2 in Jordanstown and the re-engineering of the York Street/Westlink Junction; and investment in the upgrading of the public transport system, including notably investment in the rail network.

We believe that the role of Government should be to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to encourage and facilitate the growth of the renewable energy market in Northern Ireland – this is a clear signal to businesses and entrepreneurs that government is committed to developing a local renewable energy market. Further detail on how the Executive can facilitate growth of the economy is set out within our Section: Delivering a Green New Deal.

Alliance will work to improve access to finance. Access to finance often acts as a barrier to business growth. The experience of local business in accessing the funding required to grow has been well documented and it is vital that banks work responsibly in local markets, playing a role in the development of a strong local business base. Alliance has been working at Westminster and locally with key business organisations to influence decisions made at a UK-level in terms of ensuring that banks continue to lend and that the needs of small and micro-businesses are considered.
In particular, the Alliance Party will:
✔ continue to apply pressure to Northern Ireland’s banks to increase the flow of credit to SMEs;
✔ seek a commitment to quick decision making by the banks on loan finance;
✔ work to ensure that all the banks implement the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme and support the continuation of a scheme to support small businesses. We will also ensure that government monitors the implementation of these schemes and where necessary seek to shape their delivery and uptake locally;
✔ call for Northern Ireland specific information on bank activity to be made available, enabling the Executive to more closely scrutinise bank lending and activity locally;
✔ work for the introduction of an independent credit review team, to support businesses who feel that they have been treated unjustly by the sector; and
✔ ensure that we maximise European funding opportunities to support the financing of support for local SMEs.

**Alliance will promote easier access to venture capital.** Access to private equity can have considerable benefits for individual companies and an economy in general. However the scale of activity in Northern Ireland is extremely low. Research has shown that information can act as a barrier to uptake. **Alliance will seek to ensure that Invest NI raises awareness of the equity funding market in Northern Ireland, across the business base.**

We support the introduction of a co-investment scheme for SMEs and the targeting of equity finance toward seed and early stage investment in innovative companies.

Alliance supports the growth of the HALO and business angel model on an all Island basis, and will work to minimise the impact that differences in taxation have on cross border investments.

**Alliance is committed to addressing the issues of security of energy supply and energy efficiency** which have a direct impact on the cost of doing business in Northern Ireland. It is vital that business, and in particular large industry energy users, are provided with advice on how to reduce their energy consumption and costs via the implementation of energy efficiency measures.
**Attracting appropriate inward investment**

Alliance supports the call for a differential rate of Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland, ideally at a level to at least match the rate in the Republic of Ireland. 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. A lower rate of corporation tax could enable Northern Ireland to attract a more profit focussed foreign direct investment, potentially creating an additional 3,200 jobs per year. 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.

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 £250 million. To support the level of investment required resources could be reprioritised from less efficient means of economic support towards cost of introducing a reduced rate of corporation tax.

**Alliance calls for a more effective and targeted approach to inward investment.**

Alliance will ensure that a targeted approach to inward investment forms part of the new Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland. We must move away from a volume based approach which has often resulted in the creation of jobs that are below the average private sector wage in Northern Ireland. Instead we should target key industries and sectors that will support the growth of local business, build on our competitive strengths and create high value added jobs.

Invest NI must also adapt to changes in circumstances and promote a range of our assets to create attract investment. This is vital to offset the impact of the forthcoming reductions in Selective Financial Assistance (SFA), which has been the key measure used by Invest NI to stimulate investment. SFA will be progressively reduced from 1 January 2011 through to its complete removal in on 31 December 2013. The reduction in SFA will impact on the ability of Invest NI to attract new FDI and stimulate reinvestment. Without the offer of grants to attract investment we must ensure that we effectively promote all our assets. These changes will also impact on the level of assistance Invest NI is able to offer local firms. **Alliance will lobby to retain aspects of state aid intervention post-2013.**

While attracting FDI is important to growing the economy, supporting and growing local businesses and improving their competitiveness is also vital.

**Supporting the growth of local businesses**

Alliance will develop a balanced approach to inward investment and the growth of our local business base. While we need to encourage investment in our economy, it is vital that we do not develop an economy that relies heavily on foreign investment at the expense of growing our local business base. The risks of this strategy have become all too apparent in the Republic of Ireland.

**Alliance calls for the development of a local SME integration strategy.** This should be developed to ensure that local social and medium sized companies (SMEs) are integrated into the supply chain of larger companies attracted as a result of the revised inward investment strategy. The implementation of this strategy will improve the competitiveness of local business, improving business sophistication and facilitating technology transfer.
Alliance will work to rationalise the business support infrastructure. A lack of understanding of the support mechanisms available to local business can act as a barrier to growth. Currently, funding that is designed to support and grow the private sector is spread across a range number of Departments and agencies e.g., DEL, DETI, Invest NI, InterTradeIreland and local authorities. Streamlining delivery would allow resources to be pooled, reducing the level of funding spent on administration and providing an easier landscape for businesses to navigate. Funding allocated toward business development and growth must be targeted, effective and cutting-edge. Support should be given to high growth innovative businesses. Resources should be outcome rather than process focussed.

Alliance will work to ensure that efforts to control costs within DETI and Invest NI are such that funding is maximised for supporting business. It is vital that innovation and exporting support are not reduced at this stage of the recovery.

Alliance will ensure that the restructuring and modernisation of Invest NI continues, in line with the recommendations of the Independent Review of Economic Policy completed in September 2009. This is particularly important in the context of the roll-out of review of public administration. Invest NI must focus on its primary objectives of enterprise, innovation and R&D, and trade promotion. Like our businesses, Invest NI must be competitive and responsive to local and international developments.

We call for the widening of the business base supported by Invest NI. Currently only 5% of businesses are part of the Invest NI client base. The widening of the client base will necessitate a reduction in repeat aid offers provided by Invest NI. It is vital that we do not create a culture of dependency. Invest NI should also be encouraged to work with other business support actors such as councils and further education colleges and universities to ensure an integrated approach to local business support.

Alliance will encourage greater export led growth. To support the growth of our local business we must encourage more to become competitive outside of the local market, exporting to our British, Irish and European neighbours and further afield. The government must commit to increase exports from £5.6 billion to in excess of £8 billion by 2020. Local businesses must play a vital role in this growth.

Business start up, entrepreneurialism and risk should be encouraged. Government should help local companies to access credit and support available at a UK level as well as working to ensure that local banks and finance providers actively offer schemes to local business, such as the Export Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme, the Export Working Capital Scheme and Bond support. The nurturing and growth of our local entrepreneurial talent is fundamental to the success of our economy.

Alliance will support the development of incubation and cluster zones. A joined up approach is required involving a step change in the use of enterprise parks and facilities to support high growth start up and early stage businesses through networking, clustering of expertise, appropriate peer mentoring, advice and support and links with universities, colleges and European and international trading partners. Where possible these parks should be developed to encourage the clustering of similar companies or those associated in the supply chain. These facilities should link with higher and further education, research and development centres of excellence and major companies.
Creating Jobs – Building upon our Strengths

Alliance supports the development of a £19 million short-term employment measures fund that it is estimated will create over 5,000 jobs. We will however ensure that these short-term employment measures also create sustainable jobs which add value to the Northern Ireland economy and support the skills progression of our people, such as investment in the Green New Deal.

Alliance also supports the creation of local jobs and apprenticeship opportunities through the implementation of social contracts in procurement (i.e., employment and apprenticeship quotas for large scale capital and investment contracts). We have already made a commitment to this within the construction of the joint Desertcreat training college being developed by the Department of Justice and the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

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. Our economy is going through a rapid period of restructuring and it is vital that the economy is supported to remain internationally competitive. A number of sectors may have particular growth potential. These include ICT, creative industries, medical technology, pharmaceuticals and the agri-food industry. We also see particular opportunities within the green economy and room to expand and develop the tourism industry.

Agriculture & the Food and Drink Industry

The agriculture and food and drink industry, is a highly competitive and innovative sector, sustaining approximately 20% of total private sector employment, supporting around 92,000 jobs. It is also the largest manufacturing export sector in Northern Ireland. Attracting and supporting investment in this sector to ensure that it remains able to compete in the export market is essential. We are committed to achieving the sustained growth and competitiveness of the sector and will actively work to support the sector in creating 15,000 new sustainable jobs by 2020.

Our main competitors, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, are aggressively growing their food and drink industry. Working to protect the quality and status of Northern Irish produce is an immediate economic imperative. While the growth of the sector will be supported by the implementation of our wider economic policy, we will specifically support the sector by:

✔ working with the key stakeholders to draft a clear and action orientated plan for the growth of the sector. Central to this will be increased collaboration within the sector, to strengthen the supply chain, encourage product development and improve market and distribution; and

✔ specifically targeting the sector for innovation support, ensuring that our products remain competitive on the international stage.
Maximising our cultural credentials

The Alliance Party believes the promotion of arts, culture and heritage is integral to the quality of life of every citizen, the healing of our community divisions and the regeneration of our society. We recognise that the cultural and creative industries sector in Northern Ireland is an important sector, employing approximately 12,000 people, with the potential to create an estimated 4,000 jobs by 2017. Alliance believes that investment in the arts should continue, and efforts must be made to commercialise our cultural sector and build upon recent high profile successes, such as the appointment of Derry as the UK City of Culture.

We believe the arts in Northern Ireland deliver a significant return on taxpayers’ investment, with many arts groups delivering big productions and large audiences through a small staff and small overheads. Many arts groups, on the tightest of budgets and sometimes with only a skeleton staff, have demonstrated highly-innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to their governance, operations and programming, and these have proven vital components in securing the survival of many arts groups. This is precisely the kind of sustainable development that benefits our economy and must be protected.

Alliance supports the establishment of a steering group to internationalise the local cultural and artistic offering and thus enhance not only the economic sustainability of the sector but also generate significant input into our economy. Further detail on our specific policy on arts and culture is detailed later in this manifesto.

Alliance supports the promotion of the film industry and would also support the introduction of a tax credit for television production similar to that used to attract the film industry.

ICT

Alliance believes there is significant opportunity for the growth and the creation of job opportunities within the ICT sector. Recent developments such as Project Kelvin (the new direct secure high capacity cable to North America), which provides Northern Ireland with the fastest connection to the US from anywhere in Europe, must be supported by a robust multi agency strategy to ensure that the full benefits of this highly significant development are realised. Doing so will reap significant rewards and provide much needed employment opportunities for the North-west. With clear strategic direction Northern Ireland could become a Global Web Service Node. The project also has the potential to support the growth of a range of high value sectors including; ICT, finance, health, media and advanced manufacturing. Continued investment in skills through the work of the Future Skills Action Group is crucial here.

Maximising our Green Credentials & re-invigorating our construction sector

Alliance will continue to work to ensure that we capitalise on the potential that our natural resources provide for renewable energy production. Northern Ireland has the second highest potential for energy generation through wind in Europe, as well as significant opportunity for tidal, biomass and geothermal energy production.

The Alliance party supports the implementation of the Green New Deal in Northern Ireland and the role out of the Green New Deal Housing Fund. For further detail on our policy priorities in this area, please refer to the Green New Deal section of the manifesto.
Alliance also supports ongoing investment in initiatives to improve the energy efficiency of our business sector. The cost of energy has a detrimental impact on competitiveness; awareness raising and low level investment can result in significant cost savings.

Alliance will support investment in the energy grid in Northern Ireland to indicate to business that Northern Ireland is open for business and investment in this area.

Tourism

While we have been performing well in the tourism market in recent years, there is still significant room for growth. Today tourism is worth £529 million to the local economy. The sector has the potential to double its income to £1 billion by 2020 and to sustain over 50,000 jobs – Alliance is committed to turning this potential into reality. We support the full implementation of the 2010-2020 Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland.

A stronger tourism sector creates benefits for all, not only in the form of job or wealth creation but also by fostering a sense of civic pride and increasing investment in our towns, cities and villages. We have what it takes to be a first class tourism destination; our natural, cultural, built and maritime heritage resources are truly unique. The Assembly has invested heavily in capital projects over the last three years, including: the Titanic Signature Building, the Ulster Museum, the city lighting scheme in Derry, the Playhouse Theatre and Inniskillings Museum to name but a few. These and key successes such as the Derry City of Culture in 2013 must be capitalised upon.

There are a number of changes that need to occur to realise the potential that this sector can provide. Alliance is committed to achieving these changes. We will:

✔ work to create a stable and safe political structure, ensuring that our public spaces are attractive to visitors.
✔ continue to invest in the creation of a strong and high quality brand for the Northern Ireland tourism offering. Key to this will be continued investment in our tourism product and in our skills base.
✔ support local businesses to develop high quality tourism products and services by developing capability and expertise – encouraging more private sector provision and entrepreneurialism within the sector. The private sector must be encouraged to invest and grow the tourism market.
✔ maintain and develop the link between protecting and enhancing the environment and our tourism offering. Promoting and growing tourism must not occur at the expense of our natural and built heritage.
✔ work to reinvigorate our town and city centres, making them attractive welcoming spaces.

We are also committed to addressing the legislative and policy issues that impede the development of the sector. Alliance would complete a review of legislation to identify areas where change is required to support the growth of the sector. Examples include: trading and opening hours and the facilitation of an ‘on street’ café culture, and quicker and better planning decisions.
Alliance will advocate a Bill to create National Parks in Northern Ireland. This Bill would provide for the creation and designation of National Park status in Northern Ireland. This region 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. Alliance will work toward the designation of at least one National Park in Northern Ireland. The achievement of this internationally recognised brand will mark a step change in our international tourism offering and create jobs. 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 £81 million 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.

The Social Economy
Alliance is also committed to investing in the development of the social economy within Northern Ireland. It is estimated that there are over 1,000 social enterprises in Northern Ireland that collectively account for approximately 5% of regional economic activity. The social economy network is an important source of employment for many communities and often exhibits high levels of expertise and innovation. The sector supports regeneration, can deliver local services and can work effectively in hard to reach communities. We support the creation of a Social Enterprise Equity Fund for start-up and growing social enterprises, and improved access to public procurement contracts for social enterprises. We would also seek to ensure that regulation and audit requirements are reasonable and proportionate.

We support the Social Entrepreneurship Programme focused on strong business and commercial model and access for social enterprises to research and innovation resources such as the Further and Higher Education Collaboration Fund.

Urban Regeneration – Creating Vibrant Town and City Centres
Alliance is committed to rebalancing the economy to create a stronger and more vibrant private sector. This includes the small business sector that is the cornerstone of our local economy.

Supporting Town and City Centres
Alliance will work to protect and enhance our town centres. While the nature of retailing has transformed over the last three decades, the balance between locations has not been right. Alliance supports a revised Planning Policy Statement 5 that encourages town centre development and protects its social fabric. It is important to facilitate new office and leisure development, sparking economic activity that spills into existing or new retail developments. We must attract and sustain the interest of both locals and tourists, create a family friendly evening economy, introduce flexible opening and licensing hours, ensure ease of movement that attracts people into centres to live.
Alliance will support the introduction of enabling powers for the creation of Business Improvement Districts. BIDs are a tried and tested measure whereby businesses can come together to provide value-added schemes to address crime and anti-social behaviour, address the built environment and streetscape, and promote economies of scale in supply and energy reduction. BIDs can be applied to a range of settings including commercial, industrial, leisure and a mix of uses.

Alliance also supports the facilitation of the development of a street café culture. This would potentially help in consolidating retail business, improving the commercial atmosphere, and providing amenity to locals and tourists alike. The creation of an appropriate licensing regime would provide regulation to an activity that already exists but without regulation and with the resultant tensions that can arise.

Alliance favours keeping rate rises at acceptable levels in and around inflation, and we further support extending small business rates relief. We will continue to work to improve access to finance for small business and to reduce needless bureaucracy.

We are working for an active urban regeneration policy and innovative master-planning process. This should include making our villages, town and cities safe shared spaces.

The appropriate management of transport and parking policies to ensuring access for all within society should be key considerations. **Alliance will oppose new charges for on street parking in provincial towns.**

**Urban Regeneration**

Alliance will seek to rationalise the urban regeneration process by creating a joined-up government approach. At present, formal responsibilities lie with the Department of Social Development, but with planning residing with the Department of the Environment and roads with the Department of Regional Development.

Alliance also maintains that all urban regeneration projects should be required to promote shared space. This is expanded in the Shared Society section of this Manifesto.

**Economy and a Shared Future**

Alliance maintains that there is a very clear relationship between the creation of a shared future and the economic transformation of Northern Ireland. Increased prosperity will assist in breaking down divisions. However, the current divisions have impacts upon the economic potential of this society. Divisions and violence can create additional costs for doing business, segment markets, impede full labour market mobility and deter investment decisions. Furthermore, the ongoing financial costs of addressing a divided society create opportunity costs against investment in the economic drivers outlined in this section. The steps required to create a shared society are set out in the next Chapter of this Manifesto.
Building a Shared Future

The Alliance Party has a vision of a cohesive, shared and integrated society, where people are safe and prosperous, have ample opportunities, 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. There is no such concept as ‘benign apartheid’.

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

Alliance maintains that creating a shared future is one of the greatest challenges facing this society. At a time of financial and economic difficulties, we would stress the two-way linkage between a shared society and economic progress.

Northern Ireland remains characterised by territory and public space marked out through the use of exclusive communal symbols. More ‘peace walls’, built to keep people apart, have been erected since the 1994 cease-fires than before. 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.

However, Alliance recognises many positive trends upon which we must build. Significant elements of civil society are organised on a cross-community basis. The workplace, largely through top-down regulation, is integrated. There is evidence of substantial public support for integrated education, housing and leisure pursuits. But this aspiration 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. 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.

Alliance is strongly committed to the creation of a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI).

Any community relations policy will be most effective if developed and owned by the devolved institutions. Alliance supported the Shared Future policy (2005) and the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan (2006). With the restoration of devolution in 2007, we recognised that the new Executive would wish to have its own policy. However, the time span involved in devising this policy was a source of considerable concern.

We welcomed the initial political agreement between the DUP and Sinn Fein in February 2010 within the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. This was the first time that the two lead partners in devolved Government had agreed even on the outline of a “Made in Northern Ireland” policy. That said, there is a need to ensure that policy is not developed or perceived to be top-down but builds on the wider views of society.
Alliance supported this document going out for public consultation. In doing so, we also recognised that it was deficient in a number of respects. It was important that the people of Northern Ireland had the opportunity to have their say. It is now incumbent upon the Executive and the Assembly to reflect upon these views and to make the necessary adjustments and improvements to the revised programme. It is vital that a robust policy, with the vision necessary to shape the future of our society, is in place.

Alliance does not believe that the current draft programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is an acceptable basis on which to proceed. Alliance maintains that the current draft must be significantly reformulated before a final policy can be agreed.

The current document is deficient in a number of areas. In restructuring the CSI document we recommended that it follows best practice in policy development and includes the following elements:

✔ strong articulation of vision and underlying values that drive actions, with the core objective of achieving reconciliation;
✔ clear understanding of key concepts of 'cohesion', 'sharing', and 'integration';
✔ context and linkage between CSI and other government policy objectives;
✔ an action plan;
✔ timetable and targets;
✔ resourcing commitments;
✔ clarity around a delivery mechanism; and
✔ a monitoring and evaluation framework.

Alliance maintains that there are a number of core areas for action:

Alliance would ensure community relations are embedded throughout the work of government. This includes screening and policy-proofing all Government policies and spending decisions for their impact on Good Relations and the creation of a shared future. This could be termed “Policy Appraisal of Sharing over Separation (PASS)”. This would complement the Governance Reform Bill set out in Governance section of this manifesto and support a strategic focus on creating shared future and removing the financial burden of duplication. This would be broader than the existing good relations duty that falls on all Departments and agencies.

The actual economic, financial, human, social or environmental costs of division should be acknowledged and addressed through Government Departments and agencies removing unnecessary duplication of resources and promoting shared services. The financial costs of maintaining separate services for different parts of the community are explored in finance section of this manifesto. We call for all Departments to commit to reviewing their spending plans to identify the costs of managing a divided society by 2012.

Alliance would promote a full spectrum of models for integrating education, including the integrated education model itself. We further recognise the critical role of the education system in addressing good relations. The detail of Alliance support for shared and integrated education is set out in education section of the manifesto.
Shared Housing

Alliance is committed to the development of open, mixed and integrated housing, which is freely available to all. The development of mixed or integrated housing is one of the key aspects of building a shared future in Northern Ireland.

Housing is perhaps the most difficult area in which to promote integration; there is a fundamental relationship between housing preference and security.

Within the context of the ongoing divisions in Northern Ireland and ongoing paramilitarism, patterns of segregation have become more intense. In turn, historical patterns of segregation also replicate themselves. Those who wish to live in integrated public housing are poorly served by this state of affairs. In particular, those who are in mixed marriages or mixed relationships have problems in finding suitable public housing.

Alliance welcomes the steps to develop shared housing that have been adopted so far. However, we maintain that this can be taken much further.
Alliance believes that the promotion and maintenance of mixed housing should become an explicit objective of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. At present, it allocates houses on the basis of need and personal choice of potential tenants. The NIHE does not make any value judgement between either mixed/integrated or segregated/single identity housing and is committed to facilitating both those choices in practice. The implication of this is that some people will have to be kept out of certain areas in order to preserve it as segregated in order to give people the choice.

Alliance advocates a Shared Housing Bill. This legislation 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.

Action should be taken to protect existing examples of integrated housing. This is fundamentally a security issue, and involves tackling paramilitary and sectarian markings. Too often in the past, the tendency has been to deal with those affected by the problem rather than dealing with the offenders.

Shared Space

Alliance will remain committed to addressing the various forms of contested space across Northern Ireland and promoting shared space. There are ingrained patterns of segregation across Northern Ireland. This is not exclusive to areas in and around so-called ‘interfaces’, but extends to both public and private housing areas in a broader sense and is also a particular, and understudied, phenomenon in rural areas. Towns and villages can readily be divided either through local geography or through social and economic patterns, and indeed both. Neighbouring villages can be segregated from one another, and there can be splits between a town or village and its hinterland. There are often unofficial markers that delineate territory, whether it is a building, waste land or a road, or the abuse of flags or the use of kerb-painting. Demographic change and certain trigger points can change the dynamics on the ground.

Shared space need not be neutral space; it is not about pursuing some sense of sanitised territory that denies the ability of people to celebrate their culture. The challenge is to ensure that shared space remains open, and the basis of equality of opportunity to ensure that all sections of society can have access on, and treatment to it without denying the ability of others to do likewise.

Alliance recognises that the creation, maintenance and protection of shared space is a cross-cutting responsibility for the entire Northern Ireland Executive, other public bodies and civic society.

Best practice should also be developed regarding design of the urban environment to maximise cross-community mixing. Alliance proposes that the Department of Environment should issue a policy planning statement in this regard.

Alliance would further ensure that shared future considerations are clearly factored into the Regional Development Strategy and Regional Transportation Strategy.
Alliance recognises that the displays of flags needs to be better addressed in the context of respecting shared space. Disputed symbols and the misuse of flags are a symptom of a much wider problem of sectarianism and paramilitarism, but they remain a discrete problem requiring the attention of the authorities.

There is a sense of impunity in terms of the manner of how flags are imposed upon communities without an effective response. This abuse of symbols is a departure from normal civic society. Disputes over unregulated flags can be a source of tension. Flags are often imposed upon communities without demonstrable support. Sometimes support is given by some grudgingly in response to actual or perceived intimidation. It is often easier to go along than to speak out. People often feel disempowered and intimidated from speaking out, though this is beginning to change. Self-appointed community leaders are seldom representative. It is not just people from a different communal background to that associated with the flag that have difficulties, but indeed people from the same perceived background.

While the authorities may wish to engage in dialogue to remove these symbols in the first instance, in order to minimise the dangers to public order, there are risks to this approach. Although short-term relief of the immediate problem can be achieved, the status of certain individuals may be built up, at the expense of more legitimate community and political voices that do not associate with violence. There is a problem relating to self-appointed community gate-keepers.

Alliance believes that when dialogue fails, there must be an expectation of enforcement. While it is not realistic to expect every paramilitary symbol to be removed at once, there is an expectation that paramilitary symbols will be tackled in a strategic manner, starting with defending neutral town centres, areas traditionally free from flags and arterial routes, before moving to tackle the harder situations. It is now clearly established that the public display of paramilitary flags is a criminal offence under the Terrorism Act (2000). The approach of the Roads Service and Housing Executive – the agencies whose property is most frequently targeted – has not been proactive. Outside the context of negotiation, they have rarely taken action.

The illegal or otherwise inappropriate use of other flags on public property is also a recurring problem. The use of such symbols in certain contexts is not a celebration of culture, but of sectarian territorial control. The message behind such symbols then becomes not one of unity and inclusivity but one of exclusion, and intimidation.

There is a need for the public sector to more adequately deal with such displays. A solution through direct use of the criminal law may not be readily available. But there are a number of approaches that could be taken through the civil law to deal with the problem more effectively.

As in relation to paramilitary flags, there is arguably a case that agencies, such as the Roads Service and the Housing Executive have a duty under existing equality law, (specifically the Fair Employment and Treatment Order) to ensure that they deliver their goods, facilities and services in a neutral, non-discriminatory manner. Allowing their property to carry sectarian symbols would be a breach of this commitment. This is simply an extension of the principles that an employer has a responsibility to ensure that the workplace is kept free from such symbols. The enforcement of this responsibility has contributed to the creation of a shared workplace. The same logic extends to the, albeit more difficult, area of shared public space.

Alliance welcomed the development of the inter-agency protocol on dealing with flags, and the progress to date. However, the document is deficient in a number of respects. **Alliance supports a revised and strengthened inter-agency protocol on dealing with flags to end tolerance of illegal flags or illegally erected flags.**
Alliance is committed to developing and resourcing of an active strategy to engage with communities to commence and support a process to gradually remove so-called ‘peace-walls’. This includes promotion of a new model of security that is linked to sharing rather than the outmoded approach when security was associated with separation. This issue is explored in further detail in the justice section of this manifesto.

Alliance maintains that all forms of individual and collective identity should be recognised. This includes retaining a full understanding of identity issues, and in particular the full diversity that exists in Northern Ireland, including cross-cutting and over-lapping identities. Alliance is committed to challenging all forms of stereo-typing and prejudice, and will oppose and remove all attempts within public policy to pigeon-hole people into artificial categories.

Alliance will respect all forms of non-violent, non-intimidatory cultural expression. We will further encourage shared culture. These issues are explored in further detail in the culture, arts and leisure section of this manifesto.

Alliance will support and fund a regional community relations body, as a champion of a shared future and a watchdog on government through an enhancement of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

Alliance also acknowledges that there is a clear relationship between addressing the needs of victims and dealing with the legacy of the past and the creation of a shared future. These issues are addressed later in this section.

**Looking Outward**

Alliance believes that there are important lessons that can be learnt from other jurisdictions to inform the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Northern Ireland also has the opportunity to provide examples of the development of successful cohesion and good relations policies in the context of deeply divided societies that could be a model for best practice elsewhere. This is still an underdeveloped area in peacemaking and conflict transformation theory and practice.

**A welcoming society**

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.
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. The potential benefits of Northern Ireland being more progressive in rights protections need to be balanced by the risk that we are left with a more regressive equality regime.
Alliance advocates the creation of a Single Equality Act for Northern Ireland. This Bill will harmonise existing equality and anti-discrimination measures and update and strengthen equality provisions. 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.

With the failure to date of the Executive and Assembly to pass such legislation and the passage by the UK Parliament of the recent Equality Act 2010, covering England and Wales, Northern Ireland has now fallen behind.

**Equality and Good Relations**

There is a clear relationship between good relations and equality. A shared society cannot be delivered without equality, and equality cannot be delivered without a shared society. 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. Rather than having a hierarchical relationship between the two, they should be viewed as interdependent.

Alliance is wary of a hierarchy between equality and good relations being used to create and maintain a de facto ‘separate, but equal’ reality, in which rather than a shared future, there is a ‘shared out future’, with the key argument relating to the distribution of resources on a communal basis. This can be mitigated to a considerable extent through a focus on the individual as the key actor rather than communal blocs.

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 and in other societies around the world albeit in different contexts.

**Supporting Diversity**

Alliance believes that the Good Relations duty should extend beyond the categories of Religion/Political Opinion and Race. Doing so would be consistent with the concept of cohesion. The obvious candidate in this regard is Sexual Orientation.

Alliance also supports the renewal, update and full implementation of a Racial Equality Strategy. It is vital, that the Strategy is updated to reflect the current and
future issues facing BME communities in Northern Ireland. The Racial Equality Strategy should be cross-referenced with a future Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

**Alliance supports the early production of a Sexual Orientation Strategy.** There are ongoing problems relating to homophobia, hate crime, and access to services. The Sexual Orientation Strategy should be cross-referenced with a future Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

**Alliance would support the creation of a Comprehensive Languages Act,** based around public bodies producing language schemes to address the needs of those individuals with whom they serve.

**Alliance is fully committed to the full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities: (UNCRPD).** There is a high incidence of persons with disabilities in Northern Ireland, with potentially 2 out of 5 households affected as such. Access to services, including for example public transport, is a key issue.

Ensuring people with disabilities can enjoy complete and fulfilling lives, contributing fully to society where difference is welcomed and celebrated as part of an evolving and diverse culture.

**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. 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. Furthermore, it must avoid entrenching any particular view of identity, such as the notion of two separate communities in Northern Ireland, and accordingly reinforce sectarian divisions.
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 by 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’.

Victims and Dealing with the Past

Alliance recognises that there are many victims and survivors arising out of the conflict in Northern Ireland over the past four decades, with a wide range of individual needs. These extend to physical, financial and psychological matters. On a wider basis, demands for truth and justice, and thematic and society wide issues also need to be addressed.

Needs of Victims

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. We further recognise the role played by the Forum Transition Group as the forerunner for the Victims’ Forum.

We look forward to the early conclusion of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment to guide the future provision of services. Alliance is conscious of particular feelings regarding the inequities of compensation provided at different periods in ‘the Troubles’ and the particular challenges faced by carers.

We support the future creation of the Victims and Survivors Service to co-ordinate funding and the delivery of services.

Alliance is committed to the necessary funding of the victim sector to address assessed needs.
Dealing with the Past

Alliance does not believe that it is wise or sustainable to simply draw a line under the past. There is too much hurt and there are too many demands for truth and justice. However, we maintain 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. The Victims and Survivors’ Commission have called for this process to be taken forward and for discussions to take place between the British and Irish Governments and the main local political parties.

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.

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 calls on the British and Irish Governments to convene discussions between the political parties and representatives of the victims sector, through the Victims’ Forum, to explore a potential agreed over-arching process for dealing with the past.
Delivering Sound Public Finances

While it is the right of individuals to spend, invest or save their income as they see fit within the law, it is however necessary for the government to raise revenue to ensure that public services are properly resourced and sustainable. Proper use of financial powers can have a beneficial role in incentivising and influencing individual and business economic and social behaviour, for example, toward the purchase of ‘greener’ goods and services.

Alliance supports fair forms of taxation that is based both on ability to pay whilst tackling negative features of society such as pollution.

We are committed to using the scarce resources available to our Assembly as efficiently and effectively as possible. This means reflecting the real value of goods, facilities and services and addressing subsidies and distortions.

Our policies also reflect our belief that the finances of Northern Ireland would be placed on a more sound basis if the costs associated with managing a divided society are addressed, we address the distortions created by the border on the island of Ireland and the opportunities for the delivery of shared services on all-island or cross-border basis.

Context for Public Finances

Alliance accepts the need to address the national deficit at a UK-wide level, but we have concerns at the pace adopted by the Coalition Government, with steeper falls in public spending than were arguably necessary. This analysis is shared by many economists.

We have particular concern at the impact that the cuts will have upon Northern Ireland, due to our overly large dependency on the public sector and continued struggle to rebalance our economy in the aftermath of violence and ongoing reality of division. Public expenditure accounts for two-thirds of output in Northern Ireland.

Reductions to the Northern Ireland Block Grant in real terms (i.e., adjusted for anticipated inflation), were set as part of the 2010 UK Comprehensive spending review at Westminster over the four-year period through to the 2014-15 Financial Year. The cuts amounted to 8% in current (operating) expenditure and 40% in capital expenditure.

Alliance acknowledges that cuts in public spending will cause considerable problems and distress for many people, including those who work in the public sector, those in the private sector depending upon public sector contracts or the spending power of workers paid by the public sector, and those depending upon public services.

Some of these concerns, such as the dependency on the public sector, apply to some of the other less affluent regions of the UK in addition to Northern Ireland.

The current fiscal challenges facing Northern Ireland compound the distortions from existing inefficiencies within public expenditure which have not been addressed, including populist giveaways not justified in terms of the prevailing economic and financial circumstances, and a failure to invest in new opportunities.
The Executive has failed to address long-term issues facing our society, instead opting for the use of short-term ‘blunt’ measures to address problems e.g., the winter fuel payment – which although welcome does nothing to address the long-term threats facing the elderly through inefficient heating systems and poorly insulated homes. Failure of many departments to engage with the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) is also preventing even basic improvements in efficiency.

The Northern Ireland Budget 2011-2015 was not the budget that Alliance would have produced. As an individual party, we have our own ideas and priorities but respect and acknowledge a process of negotiation and compromise within a five-party Executive. However, we did recognise that there is a clear legal requirement and political imperative for a budget to be agreed by end of March 2011. While the overall level of reduction was clearly problematic and objectionable, it is nevertheless a reality. It was incumbent upon the Executive and Assembly to act in a responsible manner.

Alliance believes that a number of measures can be adopted to make the public finances better.

For Alliance, public expenditure must be maximised to meet a number of core objectives:

1. Rebalancing and restructuring the Northern Ireland economy;
2. Modernising public services;
3. Maximising employment across the public and private sectors;
4. Protecting the most vulnerable in our society;
5. Delivering a shared future.

**Cross-Cutting Themes for Efficiencies and Savings**

There are a number of cross-cutting approaches to addressing cost pressures as identified and promoted by the Alliance Party.
Benchmarking and market testing

Alliance will open up public services to benchmarking and market-testing. Decisions on public expenditure in Northern Ireland can be informed by the nature of decisions taken in other, particularly neighbouring, jurisdictions, as well as benchmarking delivery internally (for example at a local authority level). While there are particular circumstances to the local expenditure environment and organisational differences, considerable lessons can nevertheless be drawn from other experiences.

This can extend to both the balance of spending between Departments or spending areas and also the balance of spending within Departments or spending areas. The use of the annual Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses from HM Treasury is informative at a high level. For example our prisons are approximately 50% more expensive than other prisons throughout the UK; significant savings can therefore be made through modernisation and implementation of best practice.

There will be areas in which spending in Northern Ireland is greater on a per capita basis than in other jurisdictions, even taking into account increased need, and other areas where spending is much less.

The key question is whether or not these distortions can be justified in light of Northern Ireland’s particular circumstances or whether they point to underlying inefficiencies. Evidence to date from Departments is that benchmarking is at best patchy, piecemeal and small scale. Indeed, some Departments even deny the value of benchmarking at all.

However, some important action is being conducted in this regard. Initial work in this area completed by the Department of Justice has resulted in savings in the Northern Ireland legal aid bill of £30 million per annum while still protecting the most vulnerable in society.

Alliance does not address the issue of market-testing from any ideological perspective. Instead, our motivation is to find solutions that are cost-effective while preserving service outcomes.

The cost and quality of services delivered should be market tested where appropriate to ensure that they are delivering value for money. Greater competition can often improve cost effectiveness whilst improving or maintaining quality. It is suggested that competitive tendering can result in cost savings of between 10% and 30%. We are not advocating that services should be outsourced, but rather all services should be examined to ensure that they are being delivered in the most cost effective manner – this may involve re-engineering. Partnership with the voluntary, community and the private sector is required.

Focus on early intervention and preventive measures

Alliance will work to shift the balance of services toward early intervention and preventative measures. A shift in the balance of resources into programmes that seek to prevent problems from emerging or to seek to intervene at an early stage can produce savings through avoiding the need to spend greater levels of resources after problems fully develop.

However, the funding of the former tends to be optional while the funding of the latter tends to be statutory. There is a case for shifting the balance of funding, and this means also following through with projected savings with back-end funding. This is not ‘a leap of faith’ as there is already considerable empirical evidence from other jurisdictions of this approach being successful. A focus on preventative measures can ensure savings across a range of public spending areas including health, justice and social care.
Examples include, reducing re-offending rates and improving education and employment outcomes for all. Specific examples include:

- The cost of a child in care of the state costs approximately £100,000 per annum, funding provided to family support programmes such as Home Start and Sure Start cost less than £2,000 per intervention.
- Investment in interventions to reduce the number of young people not in education employment or training can save on average £81,000 over the lifetime of a young person. Investment in interventions such as the Prince’s Trust Team programme can progress 80% of young people into employment, education or training.

**Working in partnership with the voluntary, community and private sector**

Smarter and more cost effective solutions can be achieved by working in partnership and drawing on the expertise that exists both within and outside the public sector in Northern Ireland. In a parallel to the opportunities from market-testing, the voluntary and community sector often has the capacity to deliver services more efficiently than the public sector. This often matches a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention as outlined above.

In many cases working in partnership with the community, voluntary and private sector can tackle the problems that are causing the public services bill to soar, e.g. community food initiatives and sports activities can fight obesity, advocacy projects improve the mental health of isolated people, and training and employment services impact on unemployment and welfare bills.

Voluntary and community organisations can often provide targeted solutions to local issues more effectively than statutory interventions. People in disadvantaged and marginalised communities are more likely to engage with a voluntary or community organisation. Measures must be taken to encourage such activity.

**Costs of Division/Investing in a Shared Future**

Alliance will seek to ensure that the Executive and Assembly acknowledge the financial and other cost implications of divisions in Northern Ireland, and commit to addressing such matters. This should be accompanied by a commitment from the Executive and Assembly to an overarching meaningful regional good relations strategy. The savings should be redirected into reforming public services and rebalancing the local economy.

The greatest distortions in our local Budget relate to the costs of managing a divided society. Alliance estimates that this amounts to £1 billion every year. This figure has been substantially validated by the Deloitte Report (2007) which placed an upper estimate of this at potentially £1.5 billion per annum.

This is an unjustifiable burden at the best of times, but becomes even greater at times of financial difficulties. By contrast, there are significant savings to be found through investing to save from the creation of a cohesive, shared and integrated society.

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.
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.

Financial costs and distortions are in many respects symptoms of a divided society. In the longer-term, they can be addressed through tackling the underlying causes of divisions. However, there is also a financial imperative to addressing the symptoms of a divided society directly, and furthermore ensuring that the provision of goods, facilities and services at least reflects the changing attitudes to and preferences for sharing and integration.

One particular area where there are considerable benefits to be achieved through the development of shared education. This has been highlighted by the recent Oxford Economics paper on Shared Education commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund. Not only are there clear benefits to society and young people, but there is also the potential to use resources more efficiently and effectively. It is estimated that the benefits of shared education could amount to £300 million in the longer term. However, it is important that the budget reflects the fact that the costs of maintaining a divided society manifest themselves across all our departments and spending areas not just education.

**North-South Shared Services**

*Alliance will promote and encourage the delivery of services on a North-South basis.*

There is untapped potential for shared service savings being found on a cross-border or all-island basis.

Such co-operation should occur independently of political considerations and would respect the underlying constitutional agreement that entrenches the Principle of Consent. It should also develop without adding further institutional structures.

Any fiscal or monetary harmonisation on an all-island basis is not realistic; this would mean moving out of the UK arrangements which would not make any financial or economic sense at present. While the large scale of the UK Treasury subvention to Northern Ireland is unsustainable and must be challenged, at present we remain massively dependent on a considerable financial transfer. We also recognise that there will be continued economic competition between the two jurisdictions on the island, especially over investment.

The scope for economic and other co-operation, mutual development and harmonisation, includes:

✔ the standardisation of regulations;
✔ all-island marketing, e.g. tourism, green economy;
✔ addressing segmentation in markets;
✔ investing in infrastructure, such as energy, transport, telecommunications;
✔ culture;
✔ environmental protection; and
✔ addressing barriers to labour market mobility.
With respect to financial savings, work completed within the health arena by Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) demonstrates the opportunities that can arise from shared service delivery in the health arena. Cross border working has occurred in a range of areas including cross border GP out of hours services. The work has shown that cross border collaboration can result in better planning of services for patients and the ability to sustain high quality provision on both sides of the border.

There are other examples of good practice on financial shared services on a North-South basis including the continued commitments of the Irish Government to part funding infrastructure improvements within Northern Ireland.

This initial work can and should be significantly extended with respect to healthcare issues and other matters. It is important that the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government map out all of these opportunities and then follow through.

**Raising Additional Revenue**

Alliance is committed to delivering best value public services. This does not mean trying to provide them on the cheap, or engaging in populism. Greater realism is required over the levels of revenue that are raised within Northern Ireland, especially in comparison to other regions. It is difficult to sustain similar levels of investment in public services if similar levels of revenue are not being raised too.

In particular in terms of the current budgetary challenges facing Northern Ireland, it must be stressed that no government in the world would seek to address such a financial gap through spending cuts alone.

**Regional Rate**

The regional rate is at present the main source of revenue for the Executive outside the Block Grant. It delivers an income of approaching £1 billion every year to the Executive. After a number of hikes under Direct Rule, the Executive had frozen the rate in actual terms for three years running. This freeze in real terms amounted to a cut. This was not justified in the prevailing economic and financial circumstances of the day. A real terms freeze/rise in line with inflation would have generated around £10 million in income each year. Cumulatively, the Executive would be over £30 million better off today if this limited action had been taken. **Alliance supports the belated inflationary rise in the regional rate, raising an additional £10/£15 million per annum for the Executive.**
**Remove Rate-Capping**

Alliance opposed the introduction of the rates cap at household values of £500,000 and the subsequent reduction to £400,000. The overall effect of the rates cap financially amounts to approximately £5 million in lost revenue.

The rates cap is a blanket subsidy that assists a wide range of people, including those who can quite readily pay their fair share to society. In economic terms, there is a considerable deadweight to what is being proposed. Although a retired couple, who are pensioners, may benefit a little from what is being suggested, the millionaire who lives in the mansion will benefit considerably more than those whom we are trying to assist.

There is a problem for the asset rich and income poor in society, who have problems when faced with steep rates bills. However, there are other ways in which those people can find some degree of relief, for example, through extending the current scheme to take into account widows, widowers, or double pensioners. Ultimately, a local income tax would be the fairest and best measure of ability to pay.

**Contributing toward the cost of water**

So far, Alliance is the only party that is prepared to be frank with the people of Northern Ireland over water charges. There is now an urgent financial requirement to address this deficiency. The issue should no longer be about whether water charges are introduced, but rather ensuring that they are fair.

While we do already pay for some of the cost of water and sewerage services as part of the regional rate (at an estimated value £160 per household), alongside all other aspects of local expenditure, these contributions do not cover the full cost of running the service. The level of payment is considerably below the level paid by others elsewhere in the United Kingdom and fails to cover the cost of service delivery, resulting in an annual cost of £200 million every year. This deferral is not funded through the Block Grant. Therefore, the subsidy for water results in money being directed from public services or investment in our economy to cover this.

Avoiding water charges means deeper cuts in those public services. In essence, people are already paying for water through an under-funded health service.

Alliance believes that the introduction of water charges is consistent with a progressive approach to revenue-raising and a concern for the most vulnerable for society. By contrast, continued prevarication of this issue is regressive in its effects by hitting the services that provide for the most vulnerable in our society.

However we do appreciate that families and households are under financial pressure and therefore payment must be supported by an efficient and timely service.

Any water charge must be fair, and linked to ability to pay and relative usage. Therefore the less affluent households would pay less, while the more affluent would pay more. Alliance believes that the provision of water meters must be central to any future charging system.

Also, it is the less well-off and the vulnerable which depend more on public services. The regional rate should be reduced by the assessed amount that is already paid by households through that system.
The problems with the water service in the December 2010 winter thaw bring into stark relief the historical underinvestment in the water and sewerage infrastructure, and the unsustainability of water competing for scarce resources against essential public services such as health and education. Water and sewerage should become self-financing.

**Alliance will advocate legislation to provide for the transformation of Northern Ireland Water into a mutual company.** Alliance will also commit to improving the operation of Northern Ireland Water, ensuring value for money for the public. 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.

**Other Revenue Generating Measures**

There is a range of options open to the Executive that could offset the impact of the cuts on front-line services, raise revenue to support the reform of the public sector and allow for investment initiatives to grow the economy and create jobs e.g., the Green New Deal, corporation tax etc. Options include:

- ✔ the sale of assets, e.g. from no longer used police stations and the rationalisation of the school estate; and
- ✔ the consideration of the mutualisation of selected organisations, including Northern Ireland Water and part of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

While the abolition of prescription charges and free travel for the elderly have been mooted as potential areas for revenue raising, these areas would release relatively small levels of funding (£3 million in the case of free transport). Alliance does not believe that it is appropriate to pursue either of these at this stage.

**Alternative Sources of Debt Financing and Capital**

Using public sector funding to leverage private sector investment is crucial. Untapped opportunities include the European Investment Bank, (which forms a central part of the Green New Deal proposals), JEREMIE (Joint Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises). This is particularly important given the current state of the banking sector and the lack of private sector investment market for innovative high risk ventures in Northern Ireland. The Executive should investigate opportunities to fully leverage existing funding, and implement cross departmental and area based strategies to maximise the potential of these funds.
Reallocation of Monies from Current Expenditure to Capital Expenditure

Alliance supports efforts to redirect resources from revenue budgets to capital budgets. The continued investment in Northern Ireland’s infrastructure is critical to the future development of the economy. There is also a considerable spin-off in terms of work for the construction sector. This is a major element of the Northern Ireland economy and has suffered most from the recent recession.

In turn, careful decisions would need to be taken regarding the prioritisation of future capital investment to ensure best value for money and strategic investment in the future growth of the economy. Alliance is committed to considering the transfer of funding from current to capital over the lifetime of the Assembly as additional revenue becomes available through monitoring rounds or as a result of Barnett consequentials. Any reallocation of resources should be conducted across the Executive rather than just within individual Departments in order to facilitate this strategic approach.

Contingency for Funding Corporation Tax

Alliance supports the call for a differential rate of Corporation Tax for Northern Ireland, ideally at 12.5%. We have set out the rationale for this in Chapter One of this Manifesto.

In the event that the UK Government does give the Executive the power to vary corporation tax levels during the course of the 2011-2015 period, the lost income will have to found within the context of the current budgetary framework.

Resources could be redirected across the board. However, it would be reasonable to expect that resources could be reprioritised from less efficient means of economic support towards the more efficient and effective means that is a reduced rate of corporation tax. While both industrial de-rating and selective financial assistance can be justified in isolation, they fall into the context set out above.

Future of the Barnett Formula

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 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.
Skills – Investing in our future

The economy section of our manifesto sets out the changes that need to occur and the policies that need to be implemented to achieve an economic revolution in Northern Ireland. We believe that the skills and education of the workforce play a central role in ensuring that this revolution becomes a reality.

The development of higher skilled individuals leads to more productive companies and a more competitive economy; increases the attractiveness of Northern Ireland as place to do business; improves the flexibility and responsiveness of our economy; and lead to improvements in living standards. Skills also benefit the individual, increasing their chances of gaining and remaining in employment; reducing social inequalities within our society; and improving living standards.

It is necessary that alongside our efforts to create employment, we ensure that people are provided with the skills to enable them to grasp these opportunities.

The need to invest and re-design our skills and training infrastructure is an immediate imperative. Lack of investment and a failure to ensure that the skills and training infrastructure in Northern Ireland is fit for purpose, have resulted in a number of weaknesses that affects the competitiveness of our economy.

• We have lower levels of skills than our UK neighbours and fall significantly behind our international competitors.
• We have high rates of economic inactivity – a lower proportion of our population is available for work when compared any other region of the UK.
• We have poor levels of labour productivity – on average our workers produce less than workers in other regions of the UK.
• Workers receive less training while in employment than any other region in the UK.
• Too many of our young people leave education without the security of a full-time job or are unable to find employment that utilises their training.

Alliance will ensure that the money invested in skills and training provides the necessary support to grow the economy and provide a positive outcome for our current and future workforce. We will transform our skills and training landscape.

Underpinning our policy are the following values:

✔ We believe that all employment choices are of value, that every person has an intrinsic ability and a contribution to make to society and that all individuals should be encouraged to reach their full potential.
✔ We believe that individuals should be able to choose the nature and focus of their study. However, this choice must be an informed choice.
✔ We also believe that education and training providers must provide the training and skills that will enable an individual to enter employment and support economic growth.
✔ We believe that training and education providers must be able to respond quickly to the changing needs of businesses.
Our priorities for skills are:

✔ to raise the skills of our workforce at all levels, including those already in employment (Over 75% of the 2020 workforce have already left the education and training system);
✔ to provide a skills infrastructure that supports the growth of key growth sectors, improving the competitiveness of our economy;
✔ to raise awareness among individuals and employers about the importance of education and training;
✔ to ensure that all individuals are provided with the best careers advice and guidance and that this advice and guidance, is informed by evidence of opportunities;
✔ to ensure that our skills and training providers are ‘fit for purpose’, allowing them to provide education and training that meets the needs of the economy, businesses, and individuals in a flexible and cost effective manner; and
✔ to ensure that public monies are well targeted and departmental structures are as streamlined as possible, reducing duplication and ensuring the highest levels of value for money.

Raising Basic and Employability Skills

The essential skills
We need to raise the level of basic skills held by our population by ensuring all school leavers, college leavers and graduates are competent in the three essential skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT).

The results of the 2010 CBI Education and Skills Survey reported that 52% of firms are concerned about the literacy of the workforce and 49% with the numeracy of the workforce.

It is unacceptable that a young person leaving school could do so without reaching their full potential. The need to address these issues within the further education setting is draining resources; almost £70 million was spent on essential skills provision over a nine year period to 2010. Many of our policies outlined within the Education section of our manifesto will reduce the number of young people leaving the formal education sector with poor literary and numeracy levels.

We believe that essential skills provision for all individuals up to Level 2 should continue to be free. However it is vital that this support is targeted at individuals holding no qualifications (both individuals in and not in employment), including adult learners. We believe that engaging individuals within the skills and training system who have had little or no engagement since school, is an important step towards widening access to training and education. Furthermore we call for the embedding of literacy and numeracy skills within wider training and education provision, to reduce the need for separate classes and provision where possible.

Employability Skills

In tandem with addressing a lack of basic skills within our population there is a need to address employability skills of school leavers, college leavers and graduates. Employability skills include ability to solve problems, work in teams, time management etc. These softer skills are highly valued by employers across all sectors.
We believe employers have a key role to play in improving employability skills, and that increased engagement of employers within the education sector is required. In order to improve the employability of school, college and university leavers, all university students should be offered the opportunity for work experience over the life of their degree. Too often opportunities for placement are restricted to vocational orientated subject areas (e.g. construction, business). Placements should be provided through traditional year long ‘sandwich’ courses or throughout the summer months. Other required improvements include the following:

✔ Periods of work experience should be compulsory for all school / college students. Flexibility should exist for employers to offer work experience outside of the traditional two week block and term time. Partnership should be sought with employers to ensure that work experience is meaningful, relevant and inspiring for young people.

✔ Increased engagement by employers within the education infrastructure in general, through industry lecturers, industry awareness days and careers talks are also required.

✔ Employers should be encouraged to provide studentships and internships for students across all subject areas.

Management and leadership skills

By putting in place measures to raise the skills levels of the population, the Government provides businesses in Northern Ireland with the opportunity to compete more effectively on an international stage. While the development of a skilled workforce is essential, it is vital that employers have the ability to use the skills of their employees effectively. Management and leadership skills are key to ensuring this.

Indeed, international research has shown that firms adopting best practice management techniques perform significantly better than firms who do not. It is estimated that a 1 part increase in management practices is equivalent to an increase in output equivalent to that produced by a 25% increase in labour costs and a 65% increase in capital. Clearly, this is an investment worth making.
Northern Ireland has the lowest percentage of managers and professionals out of all the UK regions. While this is in part due to the structure of our business base (i.e. a relatively high level of SME’s and a low proportion of multinational headquarters), improving skills levels of firms with low management practices, up to the national average, could be worth an estimated £150 - £300million to our economy.

Currently there is a wide range of support delivered under the ‘Made Not Born’ Campaign. It is vital that these initiatives are evaluated to determine the appropriate allocation of resources, with resources targeting those business or sectors where management practices are below average. It is vital that the ability of businesses to pay for a service is considered where there are impacts and benefits for participating business.

**Raise awareness among individuals and employers about the importance of education and training**

Alliance believes there is a need to raise awareness among individuals and employers about the importance of education and training. We support an information raising campaign, to foster an understanding of the benefits and opportunities that can be derived through education and training. Awareness raising campaigns are often cost effective ways to increase understanding and uptake. For example, an investment of around £150,000 by the Department of Employment and Learning to raise awareness of the importance of management and leadership skills, supported 800 local companies to attend road shows and master classes, attracted over 15,000 unique website hits to government information pages and created a social network group of over 250 businesses. A joint approach should be adopted in raising awareness between DEL, DETI and Invest NI.

Supporting this campaign should be a co-ordinated drive to embed a training and learning culture throughout Northern Ireland, and to promote parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes of learning.

**Informed, effective and impartial careers**

The Alliance Party believe that informed, effective and impartial careers advice is an important tool in raising the skills level of the workforce, increasing rates of employment and reducing social inequalities. It is vital that people are provided with appropriate information, advice and guidance throughout their lives to encourage participation in education and training, develop their employment opportunities and support them in fulfilling their potential.

While we welcome the ongoing implementation of the joint DEL / DE all-age strategy, Preparing for Success, we have defined a number of key actions that we believe are central to ensuring careers delivery in Northern Ireland is as effective as possible. These are:

**Appropriate advice and guidance should be provided that reflects the needs of specific users** e.g., young people, existing employees and career changers and the unemployed and economically inactive.
All young people should have the same opportunity to access careers advice and guidance regardless of education provider or chosen route of study. This advice should be impartial and independent of the young person’s education provider. In addition to equality and consistency in provision, it is also important that services targeting young people:

✔ recognise the need to engage with young people who have fallen outside the education and training network, by ensuring the service reaches those engaged with various support groups such as alternative education projects and the youth justice agency;
✔ include input from employers on employability skills, work placement, interview skills; and
✔ should be delivered in preparation for choices at key stages in a young person’s education and training progression.

Effective adult careers guidance is also required, targeting adults both inside and outside the workforce. Many people will change jobs several times during our working life, it is vital that adults have the skills necessary to make effective career decisions throughout their working life. The issues facing adults are different to those facing young people with a range of additional barriers impacting on adults including: caring responsibilities, financial and work commitments, benefit issues and lack of understanding of the qualifications and learning landscape.

Effective career guidance for those outside of work is also required. A recent evaluation of the Educational Guidance Service for Adults highlights the benefits of educational guidance for adults. The evaluation indicated that for every £1 of public funding provided an additional £9 was generated in tax revenue as a result of supported individuals entering employment.

Alliance supports a flexible approach to careers delivery to assist a range of users, maximising take up and financial resources. We believe that the Department should seek to maximise resources available by developing an innovative and flexible approach to careers delivery. A possible model of delivery is the approach adopted in New Zealand, where a well designed and developed website is supported by a range of contact options to support individuals, with a face to face service remaining available as an option. A flexible approach to careers delivery has a number of advantages including the following:

• The service is customer lead, allowing users to select a method of contact that is appropriate for them and to access advice and support outside of traditional working hours. This aspect of the service is particularly important to existing employees who are able to contact the service via email or talk to advisors in the evening and at weekends.
• It enables users to be directed to appropriate provision in a timely fashion, without the need for an appointment. The current careers service delivery model in Northern Ireland is heavily focused on the provision of careers advice within schools, with the adult population serviced primarily on an appointment-based approach.
• It maximises the use of staff resources, with staff serving the entire population rather than a selected area.
• It also maximises the use of financial resources, reducing the need for dedicated office space to be provided. Where outreach is required from the service, a network of provision exists throughout Northern Ireland that reduces the need for dedicated office provision e.g., Jobs and Benefits Offices, Job Assist Centres and community space.
We will work to ensure that all careers advice is underpinned by up to date economically relevant information. In order to ensure that this information remains effective it should:

✔ be tailored to a range of intended audiences (young people, careers changers, existing industry employees, potential industry new entrants);
✔ be regularly updated to reflect changes in demand and in support structures;
✔ clearly outline job opportunities and careers pathways;
✔ be relevant to the Northern Ireland context;
✔ detail technical and academic learning routes and courses; and
✔ ensure careers advisors are aware of the LMI and how to use it.

To minimise cost and assist with keeping information ‘fresh’, it should be made available in an electronic format. Twenty-five industry fact sheets are currently available on the DEL Careers Service website; these provide a good basis for development.

We believe where possible, information should also be passed to parents and guardians. In the 2007 Young Person’s Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, 72% of young pupils indicated that parents and guardians were the most influential factor in their decision making process when going to further education college or university. The education and training infrastructure has undergone a period of significant change in the last five years and it is vital that parents and influencers of young people understand the qualification framework and the opportunities available through vocational and academic routes of learning.

**Developing Positive Links with Employers**

Northern Ireland needs a skills infrastructure that meets the aspirations of a globally competitive economy and reflects employers’ needs. Given the need to significantly up-skill the working age population in Northern Ireland, buy-in from and links with employers is vital. We propose a number of key actions to support this including:

✔ simplification of the advisory landscape;
✔ a clear point of entry for employers seeking to train and up-skill their workforce;
✔ the provision of learning methods that are flexible and responsive (e.g. part-time, modularised, on-line);
✔ institutions that deliver training and qualifications that match employers needs and represent value for money; and
✔ the use of incentives that encourage employers to provide training for their employees.

**Simplification of the skills advisory landscape**

Alliance will work for the simplification of the skills advisory landscape in Northern Ireland. Currently DETI and DEL fund a range of organisations in this area, including Workforce Development forums, Sector Skills Councils and the Sectors Skills Alliance, Invest NI, the NI Employment and Skills Advisory Group, Future Skills Action Groups and the network of Skills Solutions Skills Advisers, as well as investment by the Further Education (FE) colleges in business development units. Clearly the rationalisation of these services would enable funding to be directed towards education and training delivery and more effective business engagement.
We therefore support the rationalisation of this infrastructure and recommend that it be reconfigured to ensure the needs of businesses are articulated strategically and sectorally, with a supporting promotional mechanism to encourage engagement between education suppliers and business. In essence, strategic skills information is required to support the allocation of government funding, and close industry provider collaboration is required to ensure that the skills and training delivered by our providers matches the needs of employers.

**Improve engagement between education suppliers and business**

Alliance will work to improve engagement between education suppliers and business, including the development of industry-led innovation and learning communities. Improved engagement is required for two reasons: firstly to ensure our institutions provide the skills required by our employers; and secondly, to support product and process development and encourage research and development and promote innovation activity through our business base. A company is four times more likely to innovate if it is in a collaborative relationship with a university.

We support a clear point of entry for employers seeking to train and up-skill their workforce. While government strategy and funding mechanisms can be used to shape education and training provision at all levels (both FE and HE), clear links must be developed between employers and education and training providers to ensure that the needs of employers are met in the short and medium term.

FE and business partnership have progressed through the implementation of the FE Means Business strategy and the roll-out of business development units in each of the six regional FE Colleges. Effective partnerships between the Higher Education (HE) sector and the business sector must also be encouraged – this is particularly important for businesses that have not previously engaged with HE in R&D-based activity. It is also vital that HE is funded and structured in such a way that allows it to react flexibly to the needs of business and individuals – currently curriculum development times are too long.

**Encourage education and training provision that is responsive and flexible**

It is essential that our colleges and universities are funded and structured in such a way that allows them to react quickly to the needs of business and individuals.

Alliance calls for the provision of learning methods that are flexible and responsive (part-time, modularised, on-line etc). The provision of learning methods that are flexible and responsive such as part-time, modularised, on-line and delivered throughout the year on an ongoing and demand-led basis are required. Flexible modes of study are more attractive to businesses and can be accessed by a greater range of individuals, allowing employees to access learning at a time convenient for both them and their employer. They also improve opportunities for economies of scale to be achieved and can be delivered to employers across a wide geographic area.

**Ensuring qualifications are industry relevant**

Training provision and course content should be demand led. Employers favour tailored training and small ‘bite-size’ training for employees that is targeted and directly meets their needs. The new Qualifications Curriculum Framework is designed to achieve this, allowing employers to mix and match different qualification to meet their needs. Where possible, training and course provision should be designed around this framework and employers should be encouraged to provide training that falls within this. Alliance also calls for the recognition of work-based learning within this framework.

Alliance will also work to develop the cross-border mutual recognition of qualifications and closer co-operation between educational institutions at all levels north and south, to share expertise and best practice.
Supporting Priority Growth Sectors

Supporting STEM provision and encouraging uptake
It is widely accepted that we need a workforce that has strong skills in the STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and maths. Research has shown there will be a growing demand for individuals trained and educated in these subject areas. However, this increasing demand is set against a backdrop of a declining number of young people choosing to study STEM related subjects at school, college and university in Northern Ireland.

Encouraging an increase in the number of individuals holding STEM related qualifications is key to ensuring a workforce that is able to contribute toward areas regarded as having future growth potential both here and internationally, e.g. advanced manufacturing, ICT, low carbon industries and agri-foods. Understanding and competency in STEM subjects is also required to increase levels of research and development in Northern Ireland and to provide businesses with the skills to absorb innovation into their working practices.

STEM skills are valued by employers across a range of sectors, the CBI/EDI education and skills survey 2010 showed that 72% of firms employ STEM-skilled staff. However, the survey shows skills shortages; 45% reported that they are having difficulty recruiting skilled STEM-staff, with almost 60% expecting difficulties in the next three years.

STEM subjects should be designated as priority skills areas within higher and further education. There must be an uptake in STEM-related subjects across all levels, from entry, to apprenticeship, technician, degree and higher degree.

An easier transfer between FE and HE in STEM related subjects needs to be facilitated. 10% of STEM students in our universities drop out within the first year, rising to 18% in engineering and technology subjects, this group should be offered alternative pathways within the STEM framework.

The implementation of our wider skills policy objectives and the embedding of STEM as a key driver within the skills agenda will also support an increase in uptake.

Areas such as agri-food, the green economy, pharmaceuticals, finance and ICT will be supported through the drive to improve STEM.

Alliance believes that creative arts and design subjects should also be valued and supported. Demand for creative arts and design skills is likely to increase in the future. The creative and arts subjects are seen as key skills that complement STEM-related subjects, providing individuals with the skills to innovate. In addition creative and cultural industries are an important sector in Northern Ireland and one that is not only important in its own right but also makes a positive contribution to Northern Ireland as a visitor destination. The success of Derry in achieving UK City of Culture is testament to our talent and potential in this area.

It is estimated that currently almost 12,000 people work in the creative and cultural industries in Northern Ireland, and that as many as 4,000 more jobs will be required in the sector by 2017.
Supporting growth sectors

While we have highlighted the need to ensure that STEM and creative and design attributes form part of the future skills mix of the population, it is critical that our training and education providers have the ability to work with any growth sector and address any area of skills shortage in a timely manner.

Alliance calls for the reassessment of the six priority skills areas used by the Department to direct funding. It is essential that these reflect the priority skills needs of the economy and must be focused on achieving the vision and outcomes defined within the Economic Strategy.

To enable this Alliance supports the development of future action skills groups that support the growth of skills within key high growth sectors. These have operated successfully for both the ICT and tourism sectors.

Stimulating Employer Investment in the Skills of the Workforce

The cost of raising skills levels cannot be met solely by the public sector; both individuals and employers must also play a part. We are conscious of the need to maximise scarce government resources, therefore, our policy levers are a reflection of this. It is vital that any funding provided is targeted at those employers and sectors where impact is greatest and deadweight lowest. We believe the following measures should be considered to stimulate employer investment in the skills of the workforce:

Alliance supports the development of inter-employer networks. Given the predominance of SMEs in Northern Ireland, we believe that the development of employer networks to plan and purchase training would be of helpful. Networks can provide a number of benefits to members including the development of a critical level of demand that may increase the availability of training, and decrease the unit costs of training. There may be also wider benefits such as supply chain relationships and links to new customers.

Alliance supports an individual’s right to time off for training, to provide a mechanism to support employees in accessing training while in employment.

Alliance would consider the introduction of tax credits and direct grants or subsidies to encourage business investment in training. However, research has shown that unless grants and subsidies are effectively targeted they can exhibit high levels of deadweight. Given scarce resources, we believe it is essential that funding is targeted toward addressing market failure and businesses and sectors where the impact will be greatest. Funding should be targeted at SMEs, and in particular those, who do not invest in training for their employees and those sectors that traditionally provide below average levels of training.

Currently the Business Improvement Training Programme (formally known as the Company Development Programme) delivered by Invest NI aims to develop the skills and capacity of client companies. The Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP) reported that the targeting and impact, of the £60 million spent by this programme between 2002 and 2007, was poor. Over 63% of firms reported that they would have undertaken the training themselves in the absence of the funding support. This represents a clear waste of scarce resources and, while we support the need for ongoing funding to support business investment in training, this funding should be open to all businesses in Northern Ireland and be targeted toward business and sectors where need is greatest.
Alliance will examine existing programmes and streams of support to ensure that benefits to businesses and employees are maximised, including customised training, bridge to employment, assured skills and the business improvement and training programme. The urgency of this review is particularly important given the recent cut to funding in adult apprenticeships and the economic imperative of providing businesses with the skills they need to grow and invest.

We support the continuation of the adult apprenticeship scheme, and will examine how it can be delivered in a flexible manner to meet the needs of employers and adult learners.

Streamlining departmental activities and reducing bureaucracy

If we are to encourage employers and individuals to invest in training, we must ensure the costs are minimised. Strategically, we believe changes at a departmental level could also lead to efficiency savings and provide a more effective skills and employment platform for delivery. The opportunities to provide a more effective policy platform were also highlighted with the IREP. As noted above, both DETI (through Invest NI) and DEL provide a range of services. Our policies on the future structure of government are designed to address this issue, with the formation of a Department of the Economy incorporating skills and employment issues.

**The Role of Further Education**

Further Education (FE) colleges play a vital role in educating our young people and raising the skills levels of the workforce. The network of six colleges has gone through a period of major restructuring in recent years, significantly reducing their administration and management operations.

FE must continue to be supported to work with local employers, with the flexibility to deliver the training and skills required by employers and to support business in product and process development.

Alliance supports the ongoing funding of the Connected Programme which supports Further Education and Higher Education collaboration with business.

Alliance will consider increased provision for Further or Higher Education courses, particularly foundation degrees and part-time flexible provision aimed at people in employment. Currently FE can only develop foundation degrees with local universities; colleges should be free to develop foundation degrees with UK and international universities where local universities are not in a position to support course development.

While it is encouraging that enrolment levels have been increasing at FE, it is vital that courses offered and the qualifications gained match the needs of the workforce. Public funding for vocational and training qualifications that support the growth of the economy must be the priority.

Achievement rates are still too low at around 68% of course completers, dropping as low as 44% for media and communication subjects. FE colleges must have in place clear strategies to target those at risk of leaving and non-achievement to significantly reduce these rates.
We support the ongoing delivery of apprenticeships, with a focus on their delivery and promotion in non-traditional areas such as IT and science. Support for apprenticeships should be based on demand within the local market and be strongly led by employers.

Alliance supports greater collaboration between FE & HE to reduce the high levels of first year drop out from higher education and encourage progression from further education. Currently, 10% of all enrolments drop out after the first year of university and just over 1 in 4 successful leavers from FE go on to enter university.

The Role of Higher Education

Alliance supports continued government investment in the higher education sector. Universities play a vital role in economic development and provide the high level skills and research required to address many of our economic weaknesses. It is estimated that higher education institutions generate a total output of over £1 billion, including £66 million in export earnings. It is generally agreed that there needs to be reform within the sector, including a focus on courses that will drive economic recovery and efforts to address student employability. Students must also be supported in making informed choices; currently too many are unaware of the employment opportunities of certain courses and drop out rates are high. Changes within our population over the next decade will require shifts in the structure and funding of universities, with a 50% decline in the 18-year old population over the next 10 years and the need to offer access to training and education to the raise the proportion of the workforce qualified to levels 4 through to 8. We do not believe the creation of a market system within higher education is the way to make these changes.

The Department for Employment and Learning has recently produced a Higher Education Strategy for consultation. We believe the outcome of this, and the way forward in terms of future funding and student contributions should occur in parallel to ensure we operate a system of higher education that is fit for the medium- to long-term and provides certainty for both learners and institutions.

Alliance supports a competitive and first class HE system and an expansion of provision. To address growing demand Alliance calls for a strategy for the widening of access to HE within the FE setting and better collaboration between the two sectors to ensure that there are clear pathways to higher education through foundation and sub degree qualifications. We also support the sustainable expansion of the Magee Campus at the University of Ulster; it is vital that this expansion takes place in collaboration with the North West Regional College.

We also support a review of the HE funding model to ensure that institutions are able to provide courses that are flexible enough to support teaching and enrolment of non-traditional learners, support student transfer and allow for the integration of different modes of learning, e.g. modularised and virtual.

Alliance believes that Government should remain the primary funder of higher education teaching and will resist a move toward the level of student contributions in place in England.

Alliance will work to improve the efficiency of the university system, ensuring that public funding is focused on raising educational standards and outcomes.
Alliance supports the widening participation agenda – affordability should not be a factor in accessing higher education. We support the retention of a higher education system free at the point of entry.

Alliance is opposed to unfair rises in tuition fees. Devolution is about being able to make different decisions on funding priorities. In England the increase in student fees is being taken for financial reasons, we must continue to invest in skills to support the growth of our economy. We will resist moves to increase student contributions to the levels in place in England. Cost should not be a barrier to participation and we must strive to maintain the highest participation rates in the UK. It is also vital that our universities compete to retain our young people; it is estimated that only 42% of local graduates who study outside of Northern Ireland return here to work.

Alliance supports a progressive system of repayment, where the amount paid back is tied to what a student earns and an increase in the repayment threshold to reflect specific Northern Ireland conditions is key. We will also consider the introduction of real rate of interest and a reduction in the student loan subsidy for graduates in the highest income brackets.

We will limit the level of support available to Northern Ireland students studying in GB to the maximum available to Northern Ireland students studying at local universities.

Alliance supports the introduction of parity of funding for part-time participants in higher education. We also support access for student funding and loan arrangements, for part-time students, in line with those offered to full-time students.

Alliance is dedicated to the continued competitiveness of our universities. It is vital that our universities have a strong research emphasis in order to compete in the global education market and ensure that our graduates are held in high esteem.

Lifelong Learning and Reducing the Barriers to Education

In addition to meeting the needs of our changing economy, skills and training provision must also reflect the changing age structure of our population. Age should not be a barrier to accessing education and training opportunities. Lifelong learning and skills development are essential for older people to participate fully in society and to remain economically active. Learning can make a positive contribution to quality of life and well-being and can promote the retention of independence for longer and provide protection against cognitive decline.

Community education is also a vital route into wider mainstream education and skills delivery. Alliance calls for community education and lifelong learning to be embedded within our skills provision.
Increasing Levels of Employment

Supporting the new unemployed
Alliance is committed to supporting people who find themselves newly unemployed or at risk of employment to move rapidly back into employment. The longer a person remains unemployed the less likely they are to re-enter the workforce.

Job brokerage, careers advice and guidance and re-skilling should all form part of this package where appropriate. We also call for ongoing roll-out of support offered by the Redundancy Service and Rapid Response teams to match those at risk of redundancy to available job opportunities, to provide support with retraining where necessary and to access to training and work placement that can support them in a speedy move into re-employment.

Supporting the long-term unemployed and inactive
Alongside our commitment to create employment opportunities and up-skill the working age population, there is a need to support those who are unemployed and inactive in re-entering the workforce.

Despite substantial falls in unemployment throughout the 1990s and up until the recent economic downturn, rates of economic inactivity have remained persistently high, and are far in excess of the UK average. Today almost 30% (more than 300,000 people) of our working age population are recorded as inactive, compared to 1 in 5 throughout the UK. This high level of inactivity not only places a burden on society in terms of benefit payments, but also leads to social inequalities, trapping families in cycles of deprivation and unemployment.

The Alliance Party does not support the approach adopted by Westminster to move people from welfare toward work through the use of sanctions. These fail to consider local job market conditions, the impact upon household and childhood poverty and the need to address the range of barriers to employment.

This range of barriers, that prevent an individual from entering employment, can include health issues (including mental health), dependency issues, caring responsibilities, homelessness, lack of qualifications and confidence. A client-centred approach is crucial to addressing these issues. Alliance supports the role of the community and voluntary sector in supporting the unemployed and inactive to enter employment and training. Delivery of this nature has proved to be a highly successful and cost effective way of supporting people to move into employment, education and training. The Local Employment Intermediary Service delivered in areas of high unemployment and inactivity in Belfast, Derry and Strabane has been highly successful. It is vital that the Department learns from the good practice approaches adopted by many community and voluntary organisations and embeds these within mainstream working.

However, we do believe, where an individual is capable of working they should be encouraged and supported to move into employment.

This is one area where working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector can result in real improvements, often people who are inactive will not readily engage with mainstream provision.
Alliance calls for joined up action between Departments to support areas of deprivation, and reduce income inequalities, by tackling barriers to employment. A co-ordinated total place solution will reduce bureaucracy, improve outcomes for individuals and ensure there is a clear point of entry for an individual. In each community there are often a range of programmes and organisations who can deliver support and advice and guidance to move people into employment.

We support a co-ordinated area based approach being given to employment programmes, with community and voluntary groups, education providers, the statutory sector, and businesses working in collaboration. There are a number of benefits to this: it provides a clear point of entry for individuals and employers; it reduces duplication and the levels of funding spent on administration and management; and it allows for more consistent provision. Improved collaboration between providers will also support progression onto DEL mainstream provision such as Steps to Work, Pathways to Work and the progress2work programmes.

**Alliance supports the development of a cross agency area based approach to address inactivity and unemployment in areas of high deprivation.**

Returning to work can be particularly challenging for lone parents, who face many barriers such as access to childcare and fear of losing their benefits. Alliance supports the introduction of a pilot scheme to support parents who make the transition to employment, including additional support and assistance for employment; child care support; and an earnings disregard to enable them to keep some of their benefits when making the transition into sustained employment.

It is vital that the training provided through the Steps to Work Programme reflects the skills demanded by both current and future employers. Offering individuals training and education in areas where there are no vacancies, or an abundant pool of skilled labour, should be avoided.

We support improved links with employers. Alliance is wary of conditions placed on the long-term unemployed and inactive to participate in voluntary employment schemes. Mandatory work experience programmes have proved unsuccessful in the past both for participants and employers. We believe that work experience and voluntary placements are crucial in moving people into work and will work to embed good practice that exist within a number of providers such as Business in the Community and the Employer Services Board, programmes and initiatives supported by the European Social Fund and the Bridge to Employment and Direct Bridge Programme. It is vital that employers buy into the process.

**Alliance supports the introduction of social clauses within public sector procurement contracts.** The public sector should lead the way in demonstrating social responsibility.

Alliance will examine the Department of Welfare and Pensions pilots of the ‘invest to save’ approach which rewards providers who invest upfront to move people into employment by paying them an element of the financial savings of moving the individual off work and into employment.
Reducing the number of young people not in education, training or employment

There are currently 41,000 16 – 24 year olds who are not in employment, education or training. Youth unemployment has risen to 20%, more than double the adult unemployment rate. It is estimated that every young person not in education training or employment costs the economy £160,000 over the lifetime of the young person.

The issue of young people who are NEET represents a significant drain on the economy and a huge social, emotional and personal cost for the young people involved. There is a core group of NEET young people (current estimates suggest 12,000 16 – 24 year olds) who face inter-generational disadvantage, substantial barriers and 50% of whom are likely to become economically inactive. The total cost of those 12,000 young people is almost £2 billion. There are currently proposals to develop a NEET Strategy.

**Alliance would make reducing the numbers of NEET young people a priority in the next Programme for Government.**

**Alliance supports the implementation of the NEET strategy.** It is vital that this strategy is committed to early intervention and good practice and is resourced on a cross-departmental basis.

Alliance believe that the financial support similar to that offered under the EMA has a role to play in widening participation among young people from less well off or deprived backgrounds. We support a review of the EMA to ensure that is targeted at those families and young people to whom it can make a real difference. Better targeting may release funding to support the implementation of the wider NEET strategy, it is estimated that better targeting could free up to £5 million.
Creating a First Class Education System

Alliance regards education as a key investment for society as a whole, and for the future development of our economy. A first-class education system supports every person to develop to their full potential.

The ongoing debate on the structure and effectiveness of our education system is one of the most important facing society today. It is vital that decisions are based on what is best for our children and our society rather than based on party political positions.

There are a number of important issues that need addressed: the post primary transfer debate, the deadlock on the future of the Education and Skills Authority (designed to streamline management and administration), the demand for integrated education, and inefficiencies within the school estate. Our current education system is also failing a significant proportion of our young people.

Across the education sector, there is a slow awakening to the problems of over provision and the surplus of school places. There are currently almost 70,000 empty school places.

As a result of this deadlock and a failure to modernise, Northern Ireland has the highest level of spending on education per head of the population than any other part of the UK. However, less is actually spent per pupil than anywhere else. Budgets have become skewed; money is being eaten up through over-administration, and the surplus provision of partially empty buildings. With too much money locked up in an inefficient school estate, the pressure for cuts falls on teachers, pupils, transport, support and special needs. This imbalance of funding has also resulted in too many young people leaving formal education with poor levels of literacy and numeracy.

We have the solutions to these problems.
Supporting Integrated and Mixed Education

In most other parts of Europe, and further afield, a single, integrated public education system is the norm. However, in Northern Ireland, for various historical reasons, the primary and secondary education system has become organised and publicly funded on a religiously segregated basis. The demand for integrated places far exceeds places available. Polls suggest an overwhelming level of support in the population for integrated education.

Through its relatively short history, the integrated school movement has demonstrated that children can successfully mix through schooling and that the benefits of that experience stays with them in later life.

There needs to be a very clear commitment to integrated and shared education. The opportunity to move in this direction is provided by the emerging policy framework around Area Planning and Sustainable Schools.

For the foreseeable future, there will remain a number of different education sectors. Alliance is not proposing that these are abolished or amalgamated into a single system.

Rather, Alliance sees a menu of options that work toward integrating education. Integrated Education in the pure sense is only one aspect of a range of options including mixed classes, shared schools and shared campuses. All of these should be pursued. We are concerned that the Department of Education treats integrated education as part of the problem facing our education system rather than part of the solution.

We believe that moving forward integrated and mixed education must become the norm. We are committed to ensuring that 20% of our children are taught in integrated education and 40% in mixed education by 2020.

Shared education can deliver both financial benefits and social benefits.
Financial benefits include:
• addressing the cost of maintaining around 70,000 empty school places;
• enabling funding to be directed toward pupils rather than sustaining a divided estate;
• improving sustainability and making it easier to fund the modernisation of the school estate;
• achieving financial savings as a result of mainstreaming community relations work in schools; and
• delivering further savings in administration and management costs through the development of an Educational and Skills Authority.

Social benefits include:
• better opportunities for local interaction with the community and business;
• a system of education that better reflects a society in which more and more people are defining themselves differently, taking into account the growing number of ethnic minority families and an increased number of mixed marriages and mixed relationships;
• enabling children and young people to experience a wider mix of relationships and friendships both inside and outside school;
• allowing children to develop their own identity as opposed to developing an identity as a result of their schooling;
• maximising contact between children from different backgrounds, which would help to address the wider pressures of a divided society in the future; and
• making it easier to standardise the quality of education and therefore to address inequalities.

We believe that a stronger focus on integrated and shared education would also result in a modern education system fit for the 21st century. Benefits to education include:
• protecting local provision, especially where separate schools are under pressure;
• allowing for stabilisation of enrolment numbers;
• making it easier for a wider choice of subjects to be sustained; and
• providing a wider choice for pupils in terms of leisure, cultural and sporting activities.
Alliance advocates the following nine-point plan to expand the provision of integrated education:

1. Government should continue to support the creation and maintenance of new-build integrated schools.
2. Government should set a minimum target of 20% of children being educated in integrated schools and 40% in mixed schools by 2020.
3. The duty on the Department of Education to encourage, not merely to facilitate, the development of integrated education must be enforced.
4. This duty should also be extended to Education and Library Boards (and eventually the Education and Skills Authority).
5. Where new schools are being built, for example to service new housing developments, the Department should survey local residents regarding a presumption that they will be integrated or mixed. As far as possible, new schools should be sited to service mixed catchment areas.
6. Government should encourage the transformation of existing schools to integrated status and review the current procedures to make this easier.
7. Government must reform and relax the criteria for the creation and maintenance of integrated schools, giving recognition to those children of mixed, other or no religious background.
8. Government should give formal recognition to the contribution being made to the process of reconciliation by ‘mixed’ schools, those with a mixed enrolment but not formal integrated status.
9. Government should advocate the de-segregation of teacher training courses and facilities, and the familiarisation of integrated education policies and practices in such institutions.

Alliance will work for the introduction of a Shared and Integrated Education Bill. This Bill will provide a clear framework and system of support for the implementation on the above 9 point plan and ensure that the desire from the public for integrated and mixed education is followed through by the next Assembly.

Structures and Funding

Alliance is very conscious of the inefficiencies within the school estate. There are problems due to duplication in the administration and provision of buildings. The proposed new Education & Skills Authority designed to tackle this was due to come into being on 1 January 2010 and is still not up and running due to deadlock at Stormont.

Alliance will support the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, and will work to introduce the necessary legislation. 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 some of 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 £21 million in its first two years of operation) as well as ensuring standardisation of school support. This reform should have been passed by the Assembly in 2009, but has been parked due to political disagreements.
Alliance accepts that there is a need for a rationalisation of the school estate. The current arrangements have allowed the education budgets to become heavily skewed towards maintenance and running costs of buildings. We believe that it is more important to invest in the needs of pupils, including in particular Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision. Resources need to be directed toward educating learners and assisting teachers rather than in maintaining a divided system and an under utilised school estate.

However, Alliance wants to ensure that any rationalisation is carried out on the most effective and sustainable basis. We are very concerned that rationalisation is currently being carried out on a piecemeal basis within sectors rather than on a cross-sectoral basis, missing opportunities for more sustainable reform. There have been some commendable initiatives between individual schools driven at a local level. We believe that the Department should study closely how change was managed in these instances and encourage other institutions to follow good practice.

Alliance also acknowledges the desire of many people to have a local school. The rationalisation of schools on an integrated or another shared basis will create more opportunities for pupils to attend local schools.

It is also important to stress that segregation in schools is not simply a matter of religion or communal background. There are divisions based on class, perceived ability and gender. All of these create serious inefficiencies and problems in themselves which can no longer be ignored.

Alliance believes that a number of key principles are important in managing the school estate.

✔ It is important that decisions regarding the rationalisation of the school estate are placed within an overall policy framework.
✔ The interests of pupils should always be at the heart of any education system. There are problems potentially created for the education of children both from being placed in schools that are too large and also those that are too small.
✔ There should be a preference for local schools catering to local communities. This approach helps to copper-fasten a sense of community, and to reduce transport costs.
✔ Insofar as is possible, parents should have a choice of school, in terms of issues such as ethos, and also particular specialities – academic, vocational, and sporting.

Arising out of these principles, Alliance endorses an area rather than sectoral approach to planning
Early Years

Equal access to high quality provision is important to support the educational and social development of children. The first three years of a child’s life are critical in determining how well they do in terms of health, education and even future employment. We spend £630 per child on early years compared to an average £2,000 per child in Britain. We spend £80 per child on Sure Start compared to £600 per child in Britain. It is vital that household income and geography are not factors in the quality of provision afforded to a child; all children should be provided with the best possible start in life. Investment in early years is critical to ensure that educational, social, emotional and cognitive development of our future generations.

Alliance supports a rebalancing of the education budget, towards early and primary education. This should be supported by clear guidance on best practice and the outcomes that post and primary provision are expected to achieve.

Alliance supports a rebalancing of the education budget, towards early and primary education. This should be supported by clear guidance on best practice and the outcomes that post and primary provision are expected to achieve.

Alliance calls for the development of a comprehensive Early Years strategy. The current strategy must include:

✔ provision for children with a disability and with special educational needs (SEN), including uniformity of provision throughout the sectors;
✔ facilitation of a multi-agency response, particularly to meet the needs of the 0 to 3 age group; and
✔ a single funding formula for this age group to ensure consistent standards in provision.

Alliance will support the introduction of an 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.

Alliance supports continued funding and role out of SureStart services. It is vital that the Department recognises the good practice associated with SureStart Services and examines how this can be used to support a wider number of children and their families.

Alliance will introduce learning communities to enable area based planning in early years provision and facilitate the sharing of best practice between each of the three statutory, voluntary/community, private sectors.

Alliance supports flexibility within the system to enable families to avail of full-time ‘wrap around’ provision through top-up funding and/or better collaborative provision. Full-time provision supports the working poor and is instrumental in supporting parents to return to and sustain employment. We will examine how the system can become more flexible to support this.

Alliance is committed to piloting programmes of intensive family support services for those most vulnerable children and their families.
Addressing the Issue of Academic Selection

Alliance welcomes the end of the 11-plus tests, a system which perpetuated inequality and labelled children as failures at an early age. We do not believe that eleven is the appropriate age to make educational decisions that will restrict later choices.

However what has replaced it is arguably not much better. **We believe that the system of unregulated transfer tests should not be allowed to continue; it places an unfair burden on both children and teachers.**

What replaces the 11 plus has stirred some of the most heated arguments in politics in the last four years and little action has been taken to achieve a solution that is acceptable to all. The Education Minister has failed to engage on this matter and instead opted to ignore calls for talks. In the Assembly, Alliance politicians initiated talks between all the parties (with the exception of Sinn Fein) to address this issue. **In the next Assembly we will continue to work to build consensus between the parties in a constructive and non-confrontational approach.**

Pupil Centred Learning and Quality Advice and Guidance

Alliance is committed to ensuring that pupil-centred learning and quality advice and guidance are fundamental aspects of our education provision. We all learn differently and our education system must reflect and individuals learning needs and preferences.

We believe that it is important that all children should progress to study a common, middle-school curriculum, for the first three years of post-primary education. Importantly, any existing school could provide this middle-school education.

Our education system must include adequate provision for technical, vocational and academic educational choices. Pupils should be free to ‘mix and match’ vocational and academic subjects. Schools should be a valued sector of a greater partnership with other education providers, including the further & higher education sectors. Area based planning is crucial in ensuring that every child has access to a high quality of education and is afforded equality of opportunity by the education system.

**Alliance supports the full delivery of the Entitlement Framework.** This is necessary to ensuring that students have full access to a range and mix of learning and development options.

We believe that investment in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) within schools, and advancement of pupils’ awareness of these subjects is important from an early stage.

Alliance believes that all young people should have the same opportunity to access careers advice and guidance regardless of education provider or chosen route of study.
Special Educational Needs

Alliance will work to ensure that the changes to Special Educational Needs (SEN) takes account of the concerns of parents. We are concerned that proposed changes from the Department of Education would take away the system of statementing and replace it with a more confusing system that is not legally binding and will not provide clarity for parents. We would retain the current system of statements that mean a school is legally obliged to make the specified provisions for the pupil.

Alliance supports the right of children with disabilities to go to the school most appropriate for them, whether mainstream or special needs.

Alliance would devote additional resources to the education of children with learning difficulties, including additional numbers of teachers and classroom assistants where appropriate.

Addressing Low Educational Achievement

While we have a large number of pupils leaving school with excellent GCSE results, a large proportion of young people leave school with low or no recognised qualifications. One-fifth of children leave primary school unable to read and write to the required standard, while two-fifths leave with poor numeracy skills. Unfortunately deprivation and poor academic achievement are closely correlated – there is still a significant disparity between the achievement rates of young people entitled to free school meals and those who are not.

The improvement of literacy and numeracy standards within education is an essential and key element in improving overall educational attainment and consequently addressing long-term poverty and disadvantage.

Our focus on early year’s education should help to address these disparities, but this in itself is not enough. **Alliance calls for the implementation and roll-out of pilot programmes proven to address the numeracy and literacy deficit in schools.** The setting of clear targets within schools to raise literacy and numeracy standards is required. It is unacceptable that a young person should leave school without achieving their potential in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.

Alliance calls for a commitment within the Not in Employment, Education or Training Strategy (NEET) to a prevention programme that works with primary and post-primary school children, aged 9 to 11 and 12 to 14 respectively, who are identified as being particularly at risk of becoming so classified.
Community Relations in Schools

Community Relations should be integrated into the curriculum and teacher training. It should be seen as a core part of education rather than just a “add on”.

Alliance would work to improve the Department of Education’s draft policy paper Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Northern Ireland (CRED). While we welcomed their attempts to update a thirty year old policy, it fell well short in terms of an allocated budget and actions to deliver shared and integrated education.

The budget to deliver this policy should be increased towards that which was previously allocated to provide community relations programmes in schools. We would also re-introduce funding to those groups who previously delivered these programmes and schemes, and have developed expertise and knowledge built up over the years.

We will work to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on promoting contact between young people of different religions. The segregated school system means that the children can often go through their school years without knowingly coming into contact with those from another religion. However the current policy simply promotes teaching about each other rather than interaction and joint learning, the policy requires better development based on best practice.
Justice and Community Safety

Respect for the rule of law, and efficient and effective policing and justice systems are central to a healthy, vibrant and shared civic society. Our policing and justice systems must:

✔ be impartial, and be seen to be impartial;
✔ protect life and property;
✔ reduce crime and the fear of crime;
✔ provide fair and accessible justice without delay;
✔ be sensitive and responsive to the needs of victims and witnesses; and
✔ reduce levels of re-offending by rehabilitating offenders.

Devolution of justice powers to the Assembly has created a number of opportunities:

• greater accountability, with a locally elected MLA, elected as Minister with cross-community support, held to account by the Assembly, its individual Members and its Justice Committee;
• the ability to identify local solutions to local needs, rather than solutions based primarily on policies for England and Wales;
• the potential to work in partnership, within the Executive and beyond it, with voluntary sector organisations – a truly joined-up approach across government to tackling the issues that are so often linked to justice, whether in terms of health, education, regeneration, or employment; and
• the capacity to reshape the justice system to build a safer Northern Ireland, with lower levels of crime; safer, shared communities; and justice for all – that reshaping agenda has driven David Ford’s work as Minister of Justice since April 2010, and will continue to form the Alliance agenda for the Department of Justice after the Assembly elections.
Building Safer, Shared Communities

Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime

Alliance will continue to ensure that the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the wider justice system are provided with the resources it needs to tackle paramilitary groups. The first duty of any government is to provide for the safety of its citizens. There is no doubt that small paramilitary groups seek to endanger that safety, and that tackling that threat will continue to require the dedication of significant resources. As Minister of Justice, David Ford has been successful in securing additional funding from both the Executive and the Treasury to meet this need, and Alliance will continue to ensure that adequate resources are provided. This helps to ensure sufficient funding for policing to deliver community policing while combating security threats.

Alliance will press for an Executive-wide focus on tackling paramilitarism. The devolution of justice provides an opportunity for the Executive to ensure that it maximises the impact of its policies across the justice, social and economic fields to reduce and prevent paramilitary activity. This can be delivered by ensuring that our police service is adequately resourced, by supporting the work of the Organised Crime Task Force, and delivering effective services and support, across all of the Executive’s responsibilities, to those communities at greatest risk of paramilitary exploitation. The level of support for paramilitary groups is small, but the Executive must work together to reduce that support further, and to reduce the risk of vulnerable young people being drawn into paramilitary activity.

An Alliance Justice Minister will continue David Ford’s practice of chairing the Organised Crime Task Force, giving it the ministerial priority it deserves. Paramiltiarism and organised crime are inextricably linked in Northern Ireland. Organised crime and criminal gangs prey on society in a range of ways, including directly through crimes like drug trafficking or indirectly by robbery from banks and other businesses. Criminal gangs also use the border in a range of criminal activity including fuel and cigarette smuggling and illegal transportation of waste, and cross-border co-operation is a critical part of the work to combat organised crime. Organised crime can, tragically, involve the trafficking of people. Though the numbers identified here have been small, we will provide ongoing support and accommodation of those who have been victims of such trafficking.

Reducing Offending

Alliance will continue the development of a comprehensive inter-departmental strategy that will fundamentally reshape our approach to tackling the problems that lead people into the criminal justice system, and which hinder them from getting back out of it when they do. Criminal activity places heavy costs – both social and economic – on our community. The economic cost has been calculating as being as much as £3 billion per year. But the challenge of reducing offending is not one for the Department of Justice to tackle in isolation. Offending behaviour cannot be separated from housing, health, social care, education or training and employment. The inter-departmental strategy will achieve a position of partnership across the Executive, with agreement on the role that each Department will play in reducing this burden on Northern Ireland – and will provide a springboard for further collaboration with voluntary and community sector partners. The strategy will include measures ranging from the identification of young people at risk of offending and providing appropriate support to divert them, to “designing out” factors that encourage crime in public spaces and neighbourhoods.
Alliance will continue to work at all levels of the justice system to ensure that offenders are held accountable for the crimes they commit. Alongside a continuing commitment to releasing resources to front-line policing, we will investment in training, forensic science and the latest evidence gathering techniques to ensure that offenders are brought to justice and to demonstrate that those who break the law will be pursued.

Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities
Alliance will complete the task of developing and implementing a new Community Safety Strategy, begun by David Ford as Justice Minister. Although, in general, most crime-types have reduced significantly, not everyone feels safe. Anti-social behaviour has a cumulative impact on communities greater than the severity of the individual incidents involved. We will ensure that a new community safety strategy provides the foundation from which we can work in partnership across the criminal justice system and with key players in other sectors to deliver improvements, reducing anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.

Alliance will complete the merger of District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships, as provided for in David Ford’s Justice Bill which will become law in advance of the Assembly elections. These new partnerships, to be known as Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, represent a pivotal move towards more joined-up working for the benefit of their communities. They will play a key role in building confidence in the justice system, ensuring the public have their say in how crime and anti-social behaviour are dealt with on the ground, and in ensuring everyone plays their part in working towards a safer society.

Alongside this, we will support the renewed emphasis placed by the PSNI on neighbourhood policing to bring more police officers back into local contact. The additional £245 million funding that David Ford secured for policing over the next four years will ensure that resources needed to tackle terrorism are not diverted away from neighbourhood policing.

Alliance will continue to argue that safer communities means shared communities, and will place the development of a shared future at the heart of a new Community Safety Strategy. David Ford’s draft Community Safety Strategy is entitled Creating Safer, Shared and Confident Communities. The inclusion of an emphasis on sharing reflects Alliance’s conviction that we need to build a shared future, with shared communities where people live, work and play together in safety, if people are to live in real safety.

Alliance will ensure that the Justice system plays a full part in the creation of a shared society. Building a shared future for all our people will reduce the risk and fear of hate crime, sectarianism and isolation for many. Working in co-operation with others, the justice system can play a positive part in helping to build that shared future. As well as fully meeting Section 75 equality obligations, Alliance will continue to work towards the point where the justice system takes full account of shared future considerations in decision-making as a matter of course, and we will develop policies and approaches to support the Executive’s wider strategy, including in the development, extension and protection of the shared space available to communities.

Often in the past, segregation was not a reflection of the wishes of people, but a natural response to perceptions of security. Segregation in housing is reinforced by violence, leading residents to seek security in areas where the inhabitants share the same perceived communal background. Flags, murals and graffiti mark out territory, and convey the message that certain areas are the exclusive preserve of one section of the community rather than common civic space, suggesting that others are not welcome.
Security has been associated with separation, but Alliance believes that model is unjust and unsustainable. The challenge for the state and civic society is to provide and entrench an alternative view of security that is linked with sharing. The focus of security needs to shift from maintaining separated spaces, to maintaining shared spaces.

Alliance acknowledges that in many areas community-led initiatives are being taken to reduce tensions, build confidence and develop projects to create shared spaces among communities divided by interfaces. As Justice Minister, David Ford has sought to support these initiatives, and Alliance will continue to do so in the next Assembly term. These initiatives and others in interface areas will help to lay the groundwork for a reduction in the tensions which often lead to a focus on the maintenance of public order primarily, but not exclusively, during the summer months. The objective is to create security and safety for communities in ways which would develop community confidence, and thereby allow the physical barriers to be removed over time.

Alliance will press for a general review of how all public sector agencies deal with paramilitarism. At present, there is a variance in response between and even within agencies. Some try to work around the problem, others work directly with it. There is a need for a better analysis and understanding of the long-term consequences of different approaches.

Another concern is to ensure that sentencing for crimes related to the divisions within Northern Ireland are robust and appropriate. There is anecdotal evidence for example that public order issues have been treated differently than in other jurisdictions. The divisions in this society should not be viewed as a mitigating factor. Rather, sentencing needs to reflect the even wider impact that such offences can have on society, and recognise the role that strong messages of deterrence play in normalising society.

Similarly, there is a need to tackle a sense of impunity, and the impact on the rule of law, democracy and human rights that builds up when people can engage in sectarian actions, paramilitarism, and/or public order issues are not effectively challenged.

Alliance will continue to support initiatives across the Justice System to tackle Hate Crime. The problem of hate crime goes beyond our traditional divisions. Crimes motivated by prejudice or hate towards a person's race, faith or religion, sexual orientation, gender identification or disability are crimes against the very identity of that person, and attack their community and wider society. We will work in partnership with agencies through the Hate Crime Action Group, and more widely, on initiatives to tackle hate crime including the “Unite Against Hate” campaign; and provide practical support to victims under the Hate Incidents Practical Action Scheme.

Ensuring that the Department of Justice plays its part in the delivery of effective policing

As Minister of Justice, David Ford has been scrupulous in upholding and honouring the respective roles of the different parts of the justice system. He has refused to be drawn into matters that are the operational responsibility of the Chief Constable, or that sit within the accountability role given to the Policing Board. What he has done, and what Alliance will continue to do, is ensure that the Chief Constable is provided with the resources required to deliver an effective policing service, ranging from tackling terrorism to delivering local community policing.

Alliance will also complete the task of determining new long-term objectives for policing, as provided for in legislation. These long-term objectives will set the broad direction of travel for the Policing Board and the PSNI, and will be taken into account by them when setting their own, shorter-term objectives.
Strengthening Community Confidence

Critical to all the reform of policing and justice in recent years has been a focus on building community confidence. People rightly expect that the system will be both effective and fair. Building confidence is a key aspect of many of the measures in this chapter, but alongside these a focus on community engagement by each of the justice agencies will give people the opportunity to get to know more about the justice system and to raise and get answers to their questions and concerns.

Alliance will review the powers of the Prisoner Ombudsman in light of experience elsewhere, and legislate to place the Prisoner Ombudsman’s functions on a statutory footing. This commitment reflects the Hillsborough Castle Agreement of February 2010, the Justice aspects of which David Ford has been steadily implementing since his election as Minister.

Alliance will continue the work already underway to develop a Sentencing Guidelines Mechanism. The selection of the appropriate sentence in individual cases is a matter for the judiciary, and it is essential that their independence in making these decisions is maintained. However, sentencing affects society as a whole and both offenders and victims should expect that crimes of similar nature, committed in similar circumstances, should attract broadly similar sentences.

Joining up the Justice system

Alliance believes that joined-up government is critical to addressing our community’s most pressing issues, delivering improvements to public services, and providing value-for-money to the tax payer. That extends to the justice system, where as Minister David Ford has established a new Criminal Justice Delivery Group, bringing together the most senior leaders within the criminal justice system, including the Minister, the Chief Constable and the Director of Public Prosecutions to drive closer co-operation between operationally independent organisations. The Group has tasked the Criminal Justice Board with identifying a new programme of work to increase partnerships and address the shared priorities of reducing offending, speeding up justice and improving the experience of victims.

As part of a range of measures to reduce avoidable delay and assist the speed of justice, Alliance will examine the potential to introduce incentives for earlier guilty pleas, thereby reducing the time and cost taken up in cases where defendants wait until the end of a lengthy trial process before pleading guilty.

Alliance will complete the establishment of a single Courts and Tribunals Service, with a unified administration for tribunals that is independent of those departments whose decisions they review.

We will develop a Courts and Tribunals Estate Strategy to achieve a modern, fit for purpose court and tribunal estate. We will review how court and tribunal business is organised, in particular looking at the financial jurisdiction of the County Courts and geographical court boundaries, and will work with others to ensure court procedures are in place to facilitate the effective conduct of court business.

Improving Access to Justice

Alliance will implement the outcome of the fundamental review of public legal services. In his first year as Justice Minister David Ford commissioned this, in order to address from first principles the question of how best to help people secure access to justice. Of particular importance will be a shift in the focus of publicly funded legal services away from an adversarial, courts based approach to resolving disputes towards the use of mediation and alternative dispute resolution, with disputes resolved outside of courts.
The Justice Bill passed by the Assembly this year included provisions to increase rights of audience for solicitors in the higher courts. This measure will deliver increased choice to clients in relation to who represents them in court. Alliance will ensure that the provision is brought into operation early in the new Assembly term. We will also introduce new and independent arrangements for the regulation of the legal professions and for dealing with complaints about lawyers.

**Alliance will continue to reform the Legal Aid system to bring the spiralling budget under control.** The legal aid system currently costs the taxpayer in excess of £100 million a year; the budget has increased by some 240% over the last ten years, with no corresponding increase in the number of cases. Alliance is determined that we must stop spending too much of a reduced budget on too few cases, and we have already brought forward a range of measures for approval by the Assembly. Spending too much of the budget on some cases limits the amount of legal aid support that can be provided in other cases. We will continue to work in partnership with the Legal Services Commission to ensure that funds are allocated to the most deserving cases.

**Alliance will continue to ensure that the justice system recognises and properly addresses the needs of victims and witnesses.** During his first year as Justice Minister David Ford published a comprehensive Code of Practice for all victims of crime. The Code sets out in clear terms how the criminal justice agencies and key voluntary sector partners will address the needs of victims of crime; a set of commitments that a victim can expect from them; and mechanisms for handling complaints from victims who feel that those commitments have not been met. **In the next mandate Alliance will legislate to place this Code of Practice for Victims on a statutory footing.**

David Ford has also taken steps to increase provision for victims of domestic violence, by allowing victims of domestic violence greater access to the courts. He removed the upper earnings and capital limits for persons applying for the protection of a Non-Molestation Order, with the result that no-one should now be refused legal aid to obtain a non-molestation order in the Magistrates’ Court because of their financial status.

**Alliance will take further steps to protect those affected by domestic and sexual violence.** We will work with other departments to develop a single strategy to address both domestic and sexual violence, and will pilot new Domestic Violence Protection Orders.

**Managing Offenders**

**Developing a Strategic Framework for the Management of Offenders.** In order to ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach, Alliance will develop a strategic framework for initiatives aimed at tackling the causes of crime; reducing opportunities to commit crime; diverting individuals from crime; punishing those found guilty of crimes; and reducing re-offending. This framework will ensure that existing and new initiatives are delivered and developed in a strategic way, ensuring that the right interventions are provided at the right time. It will provide the basis upon which the justice system will improve, with its partners, the management of those who have mental health problems or personality disorder. This will be developed in tandem with progressing work arising from the Bamford Review on the application of proposed new mental health and capacity legislation to those subject to the criminal justice system.
As part of the overall approach to protecting people from serious harm, new sentences, with release from prison determined on the basis of risk, are helping increase public protection and giving more serious offenders the added incentive to participate in behavioural and other programmes which help to manage the risk they pose. Alliance will continue to encourage strong multi-agency working to maximize efforts to increase public protection by reducing the risk that offenders pose in the community, and we will continue to develop the law on sex offender notification and sexual crime.

Reforming our Prisons

Alliance will continue to press forward with a fundamental reform agenda within the Northern Ireland Prison Service. We will implement the recommendations of the review of prisons commissioned by David Ford as one of his first actions as Justice Minister. Alliance has been determined to use the devolution of justice as an opportunity to tackle the big issues within our justice system that were left unaddressed under Direct Rule. Reform of our prison system is arguably the biggest of these.

Alliance believes that the fundamental role of prisons is to make our community safer, and that they will only do so when they achieve two key objectives: keeping in custody those who pose a threat to society, and rehabilitating offenders so that they do not reoffend upon release. If prisons don’t achieve both of these objectives they will not deliver the service that society requires of them.

Prisons must be a place where prisoners are enabled to address the behaviour and tackle the problems that got them there in the first place; where people are rehabilitated and prepared for their return to society in a way that best ensures they can contribute positively in the future.

This is not, however, a task for the Department of Justice alone. If prisoners’ behaviour is to be addressed while in prison it will require effective partnerships across a range of Executive Departments including DHSSPS (addressing problems associated with mental health and addictions to drugs and alcohol), DEL (addressing literacy and numeracy education and skills training to prepare prisoners for employment) and DETI (creating employment opportunities upon release).

As Minister David Ford has committed the prison service to make substantial efficiencies, and has overseen the development of a Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme. Alliance will drive that programme forward, using it as the vehicle for implementing the recommendations of the ongoing review of our prisons. The programme will include the “New Deal” that the Prisons Review has recommended for prison staff, including a redundancy scheme for those who wish to leave, and comprehensive training and advancement opportunities for those who choose to serve in a reformed service.

Alliance will develop a new Prisons Estate Strategy, including steps to address the requirement for the replacement of the Magilligan Prison, alternative facilities for women prisoners, and additional requirements identified by the prisons review team.
Community Sentences
Alliance will complete the review of community sentences currently underway, and implement the outcomes of that review. As well as reviewing and reshaping the role and functioning of our prisons system, we need to reconsider whether we have the right community alternatives for those offenders, and those crimes, for which prison is neither necessary nor effective. Our outcomes in preventing reoffending amongst those who receive community sentences already lead the way compared with other jurisdictions, but we will make working with prolific offenders a priority.

Youth Justice System
Alliance will implement recommendations of the Review of our Youth Justice System commissioned by David Ford as Justice Minister. We will work to ensure that arrangements for custody of young people reflect international best practice, and to build on the recent development of the Youth Justice Agency’s involvement in the assessment of all young offenders.

Legislating for justice
Alliance has already published a legislative programme for the next Assembly mandate. Building on the success of the Justice Bill that David Ford led through the Assembly in the first year of the devolution of justice powers, Alliance will bring forward three bills in the next mandate.

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.
A Healthier Society

Alliance continues to support a National Health Service, universal and free at the point of use.

Some key values and principles underline the Alliance approach to health policy. As all persons are of equal worth, respect for individual autonomy and dignity is critical. Treatment should therefore be patient-centred, taking into account the different requirements that people may have.

**Financial Context**

Alliance understands the funding challenges facing the Health Service and indeed the pressure in relation to Social Care.

Health spending in Northern Ireland is now falling behind that in all other UK regions, having been ahead in the recent past. This situation is made even worse when the higher levels of need are taken into account. Increased costs from changing demographics, new treatments, more expensive drugs and improvements in technology all contribute to rising costs in the health sector. Leaving things as they are today, the shortfall in the local health budget could amount to £1 billion by 2014-2015.

Alliance is committed to maximising the resources directed towards the health sector from within the Northern Ireland Budget. In parallel, attempts must be made to achieve efficiencies and to make the reforms necessary to address the healthcare needs of the future.

We welcome the considerable protection that has been given to health and social services in the Northern Ireland budget. We believe it is right to make health a priority. However, full protection of the health budget would entail almost doubling the cuts in every other Department and also mean the inefficiencies that do exist in health would not be properly addressed.

Efficiencies should be pursued in a number of areas. Examples of different approaches to delivery that could lead to savings within the health sector include:

- reducing reliance on accident and emergency services – too many people, due to a lack of awareness, use A&E as an alternative to visiting their GP, using an out-of-hours doctor or a visiting a minor injuries unit;
- directing patients to the appropriate level of response in the health service as efficiently as possible;
- placing a stronger emphasis on prevention and early intervention and use of the community and voluntary sector;
- focusing on improving public health (quality of diet, exercise, smoking etc) to ease demand and cost pressures;
- facilitating the better use of technology e.g. to support people in their homes, monitor and manage prescriptions and remote care;
- seeking a greater emphasis on better home and community services; and
- the development of shared services on a north-south basis.
Alliance believes that there is a strong case for full benchmarking of the profile of health and social service expenditure in Northern Ireland against other neighbouring jurisdictions. There are areas where Northern Ireland will be shown to be spending proportionally more than other regions and some areas where we are spending much less. Such an analysis should guide further spending priorities as the local budget is rebalanced. **Alliance supports the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit focusing on finding better efficiencies and productivity increases within the health sector.**

Alliance advocates a cross-party working group to discuss and agree major reforms with the Health Service. We are conscious of the need for important decisions to be taken on the future reform of the health service. Recently political debates around health have become very bitter. There is a need to establish a strong consensus around the direction of travel for this critical area, including from service providers.

**Public health issues**

Alliance is committed to addressing public health issues as a means of narrowing health inequalities and preventing the onset of conditions, thereby easing the demand and cost pressures on the health service.

**Mental Health at the heart of Public Health**

The Alliance Party believes that Mental Health should be placed at the core of the public health agenda.

While, we welcome some recent improvements to mental health service funding, quality and access, mental health services are still underfunded in comparison to services for physical illness and considerably underfunded by comparison to UK mental health services.

Emphasis on mental health as central to the public health programme will facilitate people to adopt healthy lifestyles and reduce health-risk behaviours. This shift will allow prevention of physical illness and promote mental health and wellbeing across the life span.
In this regard, we call for the reversal of cuts to mental health service funding including restoration of funding for the psychological therapies and personality disorder services. This could not be a worse time to cut back on mental health services, which are already seeing a substantial increase in mental health difficulties and referrals related to the recession. When this is added to the historical lag in mental health funding, the higher rates of mental ill-health in Northern Ireland and the need for trauma services for those affected by ‘the Troubles’, including transgenerational trauma, the need for serious focused investment in our mental health services is reinforced.

Physical illness risk is increased with incidence of mental illness and vice versa. With mental health central to public health, many health difficulties can be alleviated in a fundamental way, for example smoking-related illness, survival rates from cancer and heart disease, the risk of depression associated with having two or more long-term physical conditions, and excessive consumption of alcohol.

Mental well-being has an impact across the social, health and economic spheres including education, employment, social inclusion, physical health, recovery from mental and physical illness, self-harm and suicide risk, participation in public life and the criminal justice system. Tackling the stigma and discrimination which is still associated with mental illness must be made a priority throughout society.

Social deprivation and economic inequalities are known determinants for mental illness and physical illness. These health inequalities impact on mental health causing transgenerational mental ill-health and physical illness which creates a vicious cycle leading to further inequality. To escape this cycle, mental health, including increased access to psychological therapies, must be placed at the heart of public health initiatives.

Alliance maintains that cross-departmental approaches are therefore required and each department should place mental health and wellbeing and elimination of stigma and discrimination at the core of policy development.

**Obesity**

With nearly 60% of the population of Northern Ireland either overweight or obese, this is a major public health problem, which creates increasing demand pressure on the health service.

Alliance supports the implementation of the Obesity Prevention Framework. Cross-departmental and cross-sectoral action is needed to tackle the underlying socio-economic and mental health issues and to provide support for people wishing to lose weight.

Alliance supports the Food Standards Agency recommendations for standardisation of food labelling to include traffic light front-of-pack and Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) information.

Environments which promote a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet should be created across the education, employment and transport sectors. For example, safe environments for cyclists and pedestrians should be promoted.
Smoking

Smoking is a major preventable cause of morbidity and mortality. **Alliance supports the prioritisation of draft tobacco regulations and calls for a robust and clearly timetabled tobacco control strategy.**

Alliance calls for outlets selling tobacco to be required to obtain a licence, tobacco displays in shops to be removed, plain packaging on cigarette packets to be introduced and tobacco products to no longer be available from vending machines.

The tobacco smuggling and trade in counterfeit cigarettes should be tackled as part of combating organised crime. This is addressed in the justice section of the manifesto.

Alliance supports provision of adequate funding for smoking cessation services with targeted campaigns for high-risk groups. Mental health needs to be mainstreamed within smoking prevention and cessation programmes.

Alcohol related harm

Alliance recognises that alcohol misuse is much more than a health issue and is a societal issue.

Alcohol misuse places an enormous financial burden on the health service, including accident and emergency units. More widely, it is closely associated with a high percentage of criminal offences, including domestic violence. Alcohol misuse impacts upon the economy and the life opportunities of individuals affected.

Research has shown that the costs of alcohol related harm in Northern Ireland are significant, estimated to be between £500 million and £884 million. The cost to the health service alone may be as high as around £160 million each year with a further cost of £82 million to social services. Research indicates that the cost to fire and police services is in excess of £250 million and to the courts and prisons £100 million.

The impact of alcohol misuse, including the alarming increase in binge drinking, is one of the biggest public health issues in Northern Ireland and must not be underestimated. In human terms, hundreds of people die each year and serious liver disease is now being seen in young people due to excessive alcohol consumption. Underlying socio-economic health inequalities need to be addressed. There is a particular problem with alcohol being readily available at relatively low cost through supermarkets.

**Alliance will support legislation to introduce the 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.

**Alliance supports calls for an end to irresponsible promotional activities and a ban on advertising of alcohol in the media.** The legal limit allowed while driving should be reduced to no more than 50mg/100ml and to 20mgs for novice drivers and opening hours for both on- and off-licensed premises should be reduced. Information on recommended drinking guidelines plus health warnings should be displayed at the point of sale, on all alcoholic products and in all printed or electronic media.
Mental health

Alliance calls for the full implementation of the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, the Bamford Action Plan and the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Alliance supports increased sustainable resources for mental health services which are still underfunded compared to the rest of the UK.

Stigma and Discrimination

Alliance calls for an end to stigma and discrimination associated with mental ill-health. Stigma must be tackled throughout society so that it no longer remains a major barrier to equality nor impacts on the ability to seek help early and the possibility of recovery and wellbeing. The public sector including Government departments should take a lead in the promotion of mental health by putting in place mental health awareness programmes, promoting equality and human rights as employers and providing work placements for people with mental health problems. Alliance also supports recovery promotion services in the voluntary sector.

Single Mental Health and Capacity Bill

Alliance supports the Single Bill for Mental health and Capacity which will set the standard in international best practice. This Bill would implement a key aspect of the Bamford Review of 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 Bill will meet the needs of all people with impaired capacity thus removing the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems and learning disability. Alliance endorses the principles of autonomy, justice, benefit and least harm.

Psychological Therapies

Alliance believes that psychological therapies should be at the core of the mental health services agenda. We support the Psychological Therapies Strategy and call for restoration of the appropriate funding stream. Psychological therapies are central to improving the mental health and wellbeing of all people in Northern Ireland across the life span. Early psychological interventions benefit both health and the economy.

Psychological therapies should also be available for people across the health sector including carers. The arts therapies should be supported and school counselling provision extended to all primary and Special Educational Needs schools.

Eating Disorders

Alliance welcomes the recent initiatives to develop eating disorder services in Northern Ireland. We call for further funding to support the development of a community enhancement model of care. Increased funding for community mental health teams with specialist support would allow patient care to be managed more intensively in dedicated community facilities and provide continuity of specialised care during a period of hospital admission and on discharge. If an individual can receive specialist treatment in their own community, the prospect of long-term recovery is greatly increased. This model would substantially reduce the need for hospitalisation inside or outside of Northern Ireland.
Mental Health Trauma Services
There is considerable need for mental health trauma services in Northern Ireland to treat trauma relating to past and current events, transgenerational trauma and staff suffering from secondary trauma. Strategic planning at government level is required and health and social care strategies should be victim proofed. Clarity is needed over funding as current streams end.

Personality Disorder
Alliance supports the full implementation of the Personality Disorder Strategy and calls for restoration of the designated levels of funding. A dedicated service for personality disorder is urgently needed in the community and for the criminal justice system.

Self-harm and Suicide
Self-harm and suicide, including the high rates of suicide in young men, must be tackled by addressing issues such as socio-economic inequalities, the legacy of deprivation from the Troubles, the effects of the recession and by providing early interventions for families in disadvantaged communities.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
Alliance calls for the historical and current underfunding of child and adolescent mental health services to be addressed. The most recent estimate indicated that CAMHS had between 6% and 8% of the total mental health budget for 25% of the population. Services should include increased community forensic support.

Mental Health Services for Older People
As the number of older people in Northern Ireland continues to grow there will be an increasing need for appropriate mental health services including equity of access to high quality primary care and community-based services. People should be able to remain in their own homes, if they wish, with appropriate support in place.

Alliance supports the Northern Ireland Dementia Strategy. We support independent advocacy for people with dementia and their carers, dementia awareness training and access to timely information for all staff, users, carers and the public. Personal care should be available to all people with dementia.

Criminal Justice System
Equity of access to a full range of mental health interventions is urgently needed at all points in the criminal justice system and on discharge. Mental health awareness training for all staff would enhance early detection of mental health difficulties. This is reflected in the justice section of the manifesto in relation to addressing offending.
Learning Disability

Alliance supports the full implementation of the ‘Equal Lives’ report arising from the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability. The views of people with a learning disability and their carers should influence policy across all departments.

Services should include a full range of respite care options which enable people with a learning disability to have an enjoyable and beneficial time, while carers require to be sure that respite will be available when needed. Young people moving from children’s to adult services and their carers should be better supported and access to a full range of activities, training, employment and leisure opportunities made available. People with a learning disability should be supported to live in their family homes or, if they wish, supported in appropriate housing close to their community. Equal access to health and social care must be ensured and Learning Disability Liaison Nurses appointed in hospitals.

Autism

The Alliance Party supports the Autism Act. The views of people with autism and their carers should influence policy across all departments.

The full range of appropriate services and easy access to mainstream services should be available in a timely on-going manner. Awareness training for staff and the public in all settings and earlier detection, intervention and support would enhance the experience of people with autism and their carers. Agreed referral and care pathways are required including seamless transition between child and adolescent mental health and adult mental health services. Support systems for parents, families and other carers are crucial including resourcing for parent groups.

Physical Health

Alliance is committed to improving services providing treatment for physical illness with particular priority being given to the major causes of disease and death in Northern Ireland such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease.

Cancer

Alliance supports the full implementation of the Service Framework for Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care. It is vital that Northern Ireland has speedy access across the life span to cost-effective top-class surgery, radiotherapy and medicines including new advances.

Alliance calls for the urgent restoration of funding for the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin Hospital.

Alliance calls for parity of treatments and access to treatments with those available in the rest of the UK including equity of access to drug treatments. Every person with cancer should have access to a clinical nurse specialist, a personalised comprehensive benefits and advice service and better post-treatment care. Earlier cancer detection is a priority. Increased public awareness, uptake of cancer screening, access to new and existing means of diagnosis and cancer research should be supported.
Cardiovascular Health
Alliance supports the full implementation and monitoring of the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework.

Alliance believes that secondary prevention measures should be supported such as a comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation service and access to heart failure nurses across Northern Ireland, thus reducing costs of readmissions. Emergency Life Support (ELS) skills training, first responders services and static defibrillators should be available throughout communities. Alliance endorses the full implementation of the Stroke Strategy, access to stroke units for all stroke patients and an increase in stroke rehabilitation services.

Respiratory Health
Alliance supports public health initiatives to underpin prevention of respiratory disease including a comprehensive tobacco control strategy. We support the full implementation of the Service Framework for Respiratory Health and Wellbeing. Provision of more asthma nurse specialist posts in the community and primary care settings would reduce costly hospital admissions benefiting patients and the economy.

Long Term Conditions
Alliance supports the need for recognition of the impact of long term conditions and the call for a relevant strategy including the issues of individual conditions, self-management and management of chronic pain. This work is urgent as there will be a substantial increase in need within the next decade.

We support empowerment of people with long term conditions to live independently, remain in employment, enjoy health and well being and be at the centre of service development. Health and social care provision should include coordinated services, support, nurse specialists and seamless care transitions. Alliance supports action to reduce the inequality, exclusion and poverty experienced by many people living with long term conditions including access to financial advice and benefits.

Alliance supports the provision of a dedicated children’s rheumatology service for children with arthritis, parity with the UK in speeding up of access to powerful drugs for arthritis and speeding up of operations for joint replacement surgery in Northern Ireland.
Alliance endorses the continued long-term funding for Northern Ireland’s muscular dystrophy Care Advisor. Comprehensive neuromuscular health and social care should be available in Northern Ireland with access to new treatments. Equity of access to education, employment, education and public transport must be ensured for people of all age groups with muscle disease.

Alliance supports the call for a regional MS strategy and the inclusion of people with MS, their families and carers in the development and evaluation of services. Neuro-physiotherapy, access to appropriate treatments and drugs and a full range of respite choices should be available to all people with MS. Research into the high rate of MS in Northern Ireland should be supported.

Alliance believes that everyone living with Parkinson’s disease in Northern Ireland should have access to a Parkinson’s nurse and quality clinical care. People with Parkinson’s should be supported to get their prescribed medication on time, every time, in hospital and all care settings. Appropriate respite care to meet their complex needs must be available for people with Parkinson’s and their carers.

Rare Diseases
Alliance is committed to providing high quality care and support to people in Northern Ireland who have one of the many different types of rare diseases. We call for people with rare diseases to have the right to a second opinion by, or referral to, a specialist centre in that disease, plus diagnosis and treatment and information on the relevant patient support groups. This care pathway should be available whether the specialist centre or support group is within or outside of Northern Ireland. Access to a single care co-ordinator should also be ensured.

Physical and Sensory Disabilities
Alliance welcomes the Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy consultation. The historical underfunding of this sector should be addressed.

Awareness training for all staff, information and communication support in appropriate formats, a full range of treatment and therapy options and timely post hospitalisation support systems are all required.

Alliance supports calls for an urgent increase in provision of a full range of short break respite options which are beneficial and enjoyable to the person with a disability and also provide support for carers. Age appropriate short breaks should be included such as smaller facilities close to social activities for young people.

Alliance is committed to equity of access to health and social care services, including mental health services, for people of all ages who are deaf, hard of hearing or suffer from tinnitus and people who are living with sight loss. Prevention initiatives for hearing and sight loss are also required.

Funding for community-based services needs to be protected. Otherwise, additional pressures will be placed on the acute sector. There are real dangers in the area of child protection and risk arising from under-funding.
Healthcare across Life

Women’s Health
Alliance supports the ongoing development of maternity services that will provide state of the art infrastructure and evidence-based care to optimise the health, safety, equality and well-being of all women and babies. Care of pregnant and newly-delivered women should include sufficient perinatal mental health services, increased provision of midwife care for women during and after the birth and the reduction of perinatal ill health due to inequalities. Midwives should have an integral role at strategic level and provide midwife-led care options throughout Northern Ireland.

Men’s Health
Alliance supports the call for a Men’s Health strategy to promote early intervention by men, including accessing mental health services. The increased rate of suicide in young men must be addressed.

Older Persons’ Services
Alliance recognises the importance of planning now for the future provision of high quality care as the number of older people in Northern Ireland continues to increase. The views of older people and their carers must be integral to service and policy development. Respect and dignity should be central values for older people’s health and social care.

Older people should be supported to remain in their own homes with a full range of coordinated care services. Particular attention should be paid to design of domiciliary services and the full range of support services needed by carers, care pathways for long term conditions and dementia and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

Children’s Health
Alliance will place a greater emphasis on child health. Early intervention and support for children and their families is key to future health and wellbeing. Underlying issues such as child poverty, deprivation and neglect must also be tackled. Vulnerable children and young people in care should have access to high quality health and social services, including mental health and advocacy, before entering and while living in care. The transition to adult services is a particularly difficult time and Alliance calls for seamless support for all young people leaving care.

Young people’s health
The health of our young people needs to be supported in particular by targeted initiatives for those living in areas of social deprivation. Health inequalities underlying issues such as self-harm and suicide should be urgently addressed within the public health programme as well as providing relevant services. There should be improved access to services for sexual health education and counselling.

Palliative and End of life Care
Alliance supports the Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy and all hospice care in Northern Ireland. We call for clarity on the funding stream for this sector to allow services to be planned which will benefit the majority of the population. It is important that a Palliative and End of Life Care strategy for children is developed and supported by appropriate levels of funding.
**Service Providers**

Alliance values the dedicated work of all health and social care providers in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. We believe that service providers across all sectors need to be included in collaborative strategic discussion of the most cost-effective way to deal with budgetary restrictions while maintaining a high quality service for the people within their care.

**Carers**

Alliance acknowledges and supports the invaluable service provided by young, adult and older carers across Northern Ireland, many of whom themselves have health conditions or disabilities. In economic terms carers provide an equivalent service to the entire health and social services budget. Carers need to be identified by health and social care providers across all sectors so that they can easily access a full range of high quality services including psychological therapies. Carers of all ages should be at the centre of planning, development and evaluation of these services which require inherent flexibility. Access to relevant information should be available at all points along the care journey.

**Medical Doctors**

Alliance believes that the views of all doctors including GPs, consultants, staff grade and associate specialist doctors, medical academic doctors and junior doctors must be integral to future planning and delivery of services. Professionals should be allowed to provide leadership on clinical matters. Medical education and continuous professional development of a high quality must be available in Northern Ireland. Adequate funding and resources are required by GPs to underpin the increasing cost-effective emphasis on primary and community care.

**Nursing**

Alliance is committed to ensuring that there should be appropriate numbers of nurses and health care assistants in all health and social care settings to allow for safe, individualised and dignified patient treatment and care. A workforce development strategy including investment in community nursing is necessary to provide services for people with long term conditions remaining in their own homes. Sufficient nursing training and professional development should be available in Northern Ireland to provide a high quality future workforce.

**Speech and Language Therapy**

Alliance supports the Speech, Language and Communication Therapy Action Plan. All children and young people with speech, language or communication needs and their carers should have easy access to integrated and comprehensive care pathways. Raising awareness of speech and language therapy would allow early intervention and timely access which are vital to prevent later difficulties with greater costs to the individual and the economy. Speech and language therapy issues also need to be taken into account within the criminal justice system.

**Occupational Therapy**

Alliance acknowledges the vital role of occupational therapy in enabling people to live independently at home, in work and at leisure. Occupational therapists should be included in multi-disciplinary teams in community and hospital services including accident and emergency, mental health, disabilities and occupational health. The important work of OTs in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing and prevention of social exclusion for children and young people with disabilities and older people in care homes must be recognised.
Physiotherapy
Physiotherapy plays a key role in multi-disciplinary teams in hospitals and the community. **Alliance supports the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) campaign to develop self-referral to physiotherapy services in Northern Ireland thereby promoting greater levels of attendance, treatment completion and lower costs.** Physiotherapists can provide services which minimise the impact of conditions thereby reducing short and long term sick leave within the workforce. We support the CSP campaign ‘Fit for Work’ which provides essential support to business and industry.

Dentistry
**Alliance is committed to securing access to NHS dental care for all and supports advice and prevention programmes to tackle the poor oral health in Northern Ireland.**

The views of the British Dental Association must be integral to the future shaping of dentistry delivery which should include adequate resourcing and increased training provision. The economic input of family dentists as small businesses must be acknowledged. The special care required for vulnerable patients, including the elderly and those with disabilities, should be recognised and adequately resourced.

Pharmacy
Alliance supports the integral role of community pharmacists in the provision of health and social care. Pharmacists can contribute to developing coordinated care provision and public health, for example by health promotion. Adequate resources for education and training of pharmacists should be available in Northern Ireland. The pharmacy profession should have easy access to government to discuss professional matters and the opportunity to learn from and implement best practice in other jurisdictions.

Community and Voluntary Sector
In the finance section of this manifesto, Alliance has already endorsed the social and financial benefits to be found from the use of the community and voluntary sector to provide certain services. This applies in particular to the health and social care fields. **Alliance is committed to directing and protecting funding of the community and voluntary sector.** Much of this work is focused on early intervention and prevention and can avoid greater costs pressures being faced within the system.

Staff Retention
**Alliance will initiate greater educational and training opportunities for NHS staff to progress in their careers. Alliance will review flexible working arrangements and ensure better on site childcare to allow parents to juggle work and home life. Support systems should be in place for all staff affected by stress in the workplace.**

Staff Abuse
**Alliance will advocate the strongest possible criminal penalties for those who verbally or physically threaten NHS or other emergency personnel and GPs, hospital and community staff. Zero tolerance policies should be implemented and enforced to support staff.**
General Issues

Waiting Lists
Alliance believes that waiting list targets should be reviewed in consultation with clinicians. The focus should be on clinical need, not artificial targets. At present, targets apply to new patient appointments only. Waiting lists for review appointments are many months behind and this can result in severe deterioration in health, the need for repeat tests and stress for the patient and staff. The emphasis on the current targets does not leave any spare capacity for urgent review cases to the detriment of health. Furthermore, elderly frail patients should not have to travel long distances to appointments rather than their nearest clinic in order to meet targets.

Accident and Emergency
Alliance supports special systems to fast-track/separate seriously ill patients such as terminally ill cancer patients who are at specific risk of infection and suffer greatly from trolley waits. Increased psychiatric liaison and availability of psychiatric assessment should be available, plus the ‘Card before you leave’ scheme for at risk patients. Public education campaigns to minimise misuse of A&E services eg self re-route to GP/pharmacist/minor injury units are needed.

Generic Drugs
Where appropriate, Alliance supports the use of generic drugs rather than branded drugs. This is one means of easing the cost pressure within the health service.

Organ Donation
There should be a well-resourced and organised system for organ donation. Public campaigns promoting both organ and tissue donation are required as is informed public debate on an opt-out system for organ donation.

Research and Development
Priorities for research and development need to be identified in collaboration with clinical and academic health and social care professionals in the statutory and voluntary sectors and appropriate resources provided to ensure Northern Ireland has access to future cost-effective interventions.

Social Services and Social Care
Alliance believes that significant opportunities exist in Northern Ireland from the delivery of health and social services through a single department and arising from the full integration of services. Alliance does support the considerable protection that was given to the health and social services budget in the Assembly’s Budget 2011-2015. The Health Minister has the discretion to redirect resources internally, and the de facto protection granted for 70% of the overall budget should not be concentrated in acute services at the expense of other areas, including social services and social care.

Social Work
Alliance believes that social work must be adequately resourced to ensure protection of vulnerable children and adults. Social work should be supported by the full implementation of the 2020 Vision for Social Work including urgent delivery of the strategic objectives and the development of strong social work leadership. There has been a damaging loss of social work line managers which must be addressed. All party social work placements would give valuable insight into the experience of Social Workers on the frontline.
Voluntary and Community Sector

Alliance also recognises the important, cost-effective role that the voluntary and community sector play in social services. This again often has a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention. Often an upfront, low cost investment through, for example, Homestart can avoid must larger costs linked to statutory responsibilities being borne by social services in relation to at risk children.

Social Care

Alliance is further conscious of the inadequate system of social care for our senior citizens in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Many older persons will be able to continue leading full and active lives. However, with the demographic profile of society changing and more people living longer, the pressure for social care issues is certain to increase. By 2030, there could be over 130,000 over the age of 80.

Social care can be provided in a range of settings. Alliance wants the system to encourage as many people as possible to remain in their homes and in their communities and to be able to receive the full range of care needs and support in that context.

Early intervention, prevention and a holistic approach to lifestyle can have a positive impact on the need for social care. By contrast, a reduction in support for social care would have knock-on implications for the health service, at higher cost, with respect to emergency admissions, waiting lists and bed-blocking.

Alliance has a longstanding commitment to free personal care for those in residential or nursing homes. It is wrong that people are forced into selling their homes to fund their care.

Alliance notes the creation of a commission in Great Britain to review social care issues. We believe that a similar strategy is required for Northern Ireland, drawing on the lessons from elsewhere, but tailored for local needs.
The Alliance Party is committed to tackling poverty and social exclusion, protecting families and the most vulnerable within our society. It is unacceptable that our society is characterised by persistent deprivation, child poverty, income inequality and large numbers of people disengaged from job and education opportunities. Cuts in public funding, rising inflation and uncertainty in the housing market have a disproportionate impact on working families and many communities, it is vital that government policies and spending supports local families and those in need.

Alliance recognises that a shared and integrated society requires economic and social equalities to be tackled, and barriers to an inclusive society such as poverty, sectarianism, deprivation and lack of opportunity to be addressed.

The need to protect the most vulnerable in our society is even more marked given the welfare reform agenda being driven forward by the UK Government. We will continue to work to ensure that any changes in welfare structures are complemented by targeted support for individuals and families and that no-one is left without the vital support that they need to engage in society.

Our policies on the economy, employment, education and skills and transport will all create a more equal and fair society. Alliance is very mindful that it is the most vulnerable in our society who depend more on public services, creating a vibrant public and private sector will ensure that we can deliver first class services to all who need them.

We believe that investment in early intervention and prevention initiatives are central to tackling poverty and social exclusion across all groups. Across the full range of issues that affect children and their families the evidence is that intervening early achieves better outcomes and costs less. This is particularly important at a time when public sector funding is under pressure and the need for intelligent funding and smart investment is critical.

Alliance is committed to achieving cross-party agreement to promote early intervention; solving the complex problems facing the most deprived children, individuals and families requires a level of long-term commitment that can only be achieved by cross-party consensus and a willingness to take an agenda forward over a generation.

Alliance is committed to long-term policies that demonstrate value for money and achieve success. Between 1988 and 2009, there were over 400 major announcements relating to children and families in the UK- almost one a fortnight. They include many positive initiatives, but many were not sustained. Initiatives that are successful whether delivered by the private, public, voluntary, or community sector should be supported and continued.
Children and Young People

Child poverty
Over 100,000 children living in poverty, this is unacceptable. The knowledge that there is a strong correlation between disadvantage, loss of hope, disengagement and conflict makes addressing this an important issue for the future of our society.

We do not accept the current situation in which where a child is born can have an impact on life expectancy and dictate future health and employment prospects.

Creating jobs and tackling low wages are central to addressing child poverty (36% of children in severe poverty are in households where at least one adult works). Our economic policies are designed to achieve this but more needs to be done. We need to see an end to child poverty. Alliance is fully committed to this cause.

Alliance will work to address the under-funding in 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. **Alliance calls for the incorporation into UK domestic law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

We support the full implementation of the Child Poverty Strategy. Addressing the impact and causes of child poverty requires a longer term strategic approach. Child poverty and its impact will not be addressed in a year – it will require a generation. However, we must start now. The Executive must give direction to all government departments to prioritise and implement measures to tackle child poverty. Strong political commitment and leadership is required to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

Supporting parents and guardian to make a move into employment can be the most effective way to move a child out of poverty. It is necessary for the Department of Employment and Learning to address the barriers to employment and to examine the support required to enable parents to make the transition, including consideration of an earnings disregard. We believe that an area based response is required to address the deeply rooted pockets of poverty where many children live in families experiencing fourth generation unemployment.
In Great Britain, welfare reform developments have gone hand-in-hand with a resourced childcare strategy, including a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure adequate childcare provision is in place. A Transformation Fund was established in England to invest in high quality, sustainable, affordable provision. In contrast, in Northern Ireland there is no lead Government department, no statutory duty, limited resources and as a result a woefully inadequate level of childcare provision. Alliance would ensure that a statutory commitment is made by the Executive to ensure adequate childcare provision is in place, including an effective childcare strategy.

**Looked After Children**

We are committed to improving outcomes for looked after children, over 2,000 children and young people are in care. The life prospects of children in care are below that of other children, 61% of children in care achieve one GCSE compared to 99% for the general population. Looked after children are four times more likely to be suspended from school than the general population, and are also more likely to enter the justice system. Alliance supports the targeting of intensive family interventions to support families where children may be at risk of entering care.

Alliance would invest in early intervention and preventative measures and proven programmes that support families before they reach crisis point.

**Alliance will work for the introduction of an Adoption Bill.** This Bill would provide a long overdue update of Adoption Law. The law in Northern Ireland has now fallen behind the rest of the UK and is 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. 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.

**Empowering the Next Generation – Preventing a lost generation**

Currently 41,000 16–24 year olds are not in employment, education or training, over 21% of this group have no educational qualifications. Youth unemployment is on the rise. This has long term financial and social costs for our society - costing a staggering £4.5 million a week through benefits and lost productivity and has a detrimental affect on a young person's confidence and future life prospects. Alliance is committed to addressing this problem and empowering and supporting the next generation to reach their full potential.

Many of our proposals to improve the skills and training infrastructure, to develop employment opportunities and to address deficiencies in the education system will work toward improving the opportunities available for all young people in our society.

We will also work to ensure that those children most at risk of becoming NEET are indentified and supported as early as possible by the education system.

**Child protection**

The protection of our children and the most vulnerable in society is a priority. It is essential that our children can live, learn and play in safety and parents can trust those tasked with caring for their children. We do not want to create a culture of fear, but we want to ensure that systems are in place to protect children from those who may cause them harm.
The cross-border sharing of information of those who may be at risk of offending is a crucial aspect and on-going cooperation, and sharing of information should be developed. Much has been achieved in sensible cross border cooperation in child protection and public protection arrangements and it now forms part of the North South Ministerial Council agenda.

**Welfare reform**

Social Security, employment support and pension policy is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, since the 1940s, there has been observance of the ‘parity principle’. These requirements are funded through transfer payments and are classified as Annually Managed Expenditure and are not discretionary spending for the local administration. This ensures the benefit payments are 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, we are able to support the most vulnerable in our society to a far greater extent than would be the case based on local resources. Changes in policy and benefit levels are best considered at a UK-wide level through Westminster.

However that is not to say that we cannot influence the welfare agenda. We can devise programmes and initiatives to support the unemployed back into the workforce, address the barriers preventing the inactive from accessing employment and education opportunities, ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are protected, shape our education and skills agenda, and support businesses to support all individuals to reach their full potential. Details on our policy priorities in this area are outlined in skills section of this manifesto.

The Department of Social Development must provide sufficient safeguards for those unable to work to ensure that everyone entitled to benefits is claiming and accessing them. This can be done by simplifying benefit forms and the system of applying for benefits, including tax credits. A programme of ensuring that a parent, when making their first claim for child benefit, is assessed for all available benefits, would have a positive effect on benefit uptake.

Alliance would recommend that the current rates of benefit and minimum wage for 16 and 17 years olds are increased and accessible information is provided on a range of benefit entitlements that are available to 16 and 17 year olds.

Access to welfare is essential to support the most vulnerable in our society however levels of fraud are at unacceptably high levels. **We will ensure that those who are abusing the system are dealt with through the courts and the resources released are reinvested in those who are genuinely in need.**

**Carers**

Almost 200,000 people act as carers looking after relatives who need assistance in their day to day lives. Alliance recognises the huge contribution carers make to society.

We believe that carers deserve a better deal from government.
Alliance will fight to defend Carers Allowance and Attendance Allowance. 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.

Carers should have access to the appropriate support facilities, and be entitled to flexible working hours.

**Families & Vulnerable Households**

**Fuel poverty**

Alliance calls for a review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy to ensure that Government is delivering for the vulnerable. The current strategy needs to set ambitious targets for the reduction of fuel poverty and address the reliance that households have on oil. The eradication of fuel poverty is unlikely to be achieved without the adoption of a long-term and challenging shift in our approach to energy efficiency.

Alliance would embed targets to reduce fuel poverty within the implementation of a Green New Deal.

It is vital that the strategy seeks to improve the energy efficiency of homes in a sustainable way, through better insulation and efficient heating systems. However given the levels of fuel poverty and the likelihood that fuel prices will continue to rise, it is vital the Department of Social Development looks beyond the ‘easy wins’ of energy efficiency (once they have been achieved) and seeks to encourage a change in mindset through the implementation of second stage (major) energy efficiency measures, such as solid wall insulation and secondary glazing.

We support the warm homes scheme. The scheme should be reviewed to ensure that it is being implemented effectively. Consideration should be given to including households that have old and inefficient oil or gas systems; and assist people with boiler repairs. We support the targeting of resources at those individuals and households who are most in need. Our policy commitments in relation to the Green New Deal are set out within a dedicated section of this manifesto.

Housing Associations should seek to meet the highest levels in the Code for Sustainable homes. It is vital that the Department of Social Development takes the lead in this area supporting the growth of the sector and the development and implementation of new technologies. The Department should be aspiring to build zero-carbon homes – looking to the long term, the higher the code enforced now the less retrospective work required in the future.

We support the Department in its ongoing partnership work with the Utility Regulator and DETI to explore the introduction of social tariffs.
Advice Services & Debt

Over-indebtedness can be caused by, and contribute to, poverty and social exclusion.

The Citizens Advice Bureau and other independent advice centres are invaluable to individuals and households struggling with debt and benefit issues.

Alliance will bring forward plans to raise awareness on money and debt management, including support for the vital work of independent advice centres.

Alliance will work to ensure that OFMDFM investigate the scale of illegal money lending and that the services of the Office of Fair Trading in relation to illegal money lending are extended to Northern Ireland households.

Alliance calls for the development of a Financial Inclusion Action Plan, to tackle local issues regarding financial exclusion and debt. This plan should ensure that people have access to appropriate financial products and services and have the skills, knowledge and understanding to make best use of those products and services.

Older People

The age profile of our population is changing; people are living and working longer. With breakthroughs in health and changes in our society the definition of older people is changing. We recognise the need to not only protect the vulnerable and sick, through the delivery of first class services and the re-engineering of health and social care, but also need to ensure that key services such as education and training adapt to these changes and are accessible to all.

Alliance will work for:

✔ 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, through the implementation of a Single Equality Bill;
✔ the introduction of age-positive hiring programmes and support measures to eradicate age discrimination;
✔ the 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; and
✔ the continuing provision of clinically effective drugs to all people with early middle stage dementia, who can benefit from their use.

We will 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 rate of earnings or prices.

Alliance supports the automatic payment of pension credits. Too many older people fail to understand the benefits process and to claim the additional support that they are entitled to.
Fuel poverty has a disproportionate impact on older people. It is estimated that 62% of older people live in fuel poverty in the UK. The winter fuel payment is essential in supporting the most vulnerable. While we would increase the winter fuel grant to reflect high energy prices, in the longer term this is not a sustainable approach to eradicating fuel poverty. Alliance would target energy efficiency measures toward older people and the most vulnerable in society, reducing their dependency on fuel.

Women

Society must reflect on the role of women and the contribution that women can make as Northern Ireland moves beyond conflict.

While there have been improvements in the role and place of women within business, there is still much to be done. It is encouraging that women represent an ever increasing proportion of the workforce (the number of women in employment has increased 58% when compared to the 1984 figure) and that there have been inroads, albeit limited, in women's representation within politics and public life.

Despite change driven by both legislation and shifts in societal norms, significant challenges still remain.

- The gender pay gap is worryingly persistent.
- Currently only 7% of female employees are managers and/or senior officials, compared with 13% of men.
- Women are recorded as the largest under-represented group in terms of business creation; this relatively untapped pool of entrepreneurship represents a missed opportunity for the economy and for women.
- Of the 116 publicly appointed bodies, only 21 are chaired by women.
- Women are under represented in politics and public life; only 14 MLAs in the past Assembly were women. The situation is also poor at a local level, only 20% of councillors in local government are women compared to 31% of local councillors in England.

The role of educational providers and organisations such as Women in Business and the Women in Business Networks are central to improving business start up and attitude toward risk among women. We must work to ensure that women have the knowledge and know how to start a business, are confident in their abilities and skills and have access to role models. We must seek to turn aspiration into reality.

More needs to be done to encourage family friendly working practices within businesses. While elements of the workplace (notably the public sector) have become more flexible in their approach to accommodating working parents, the ability to strike an appropriate work life balance is still constrained by a lack of family friendly workplace practices and access to affordable childcare. Improved take up of family friendly work practices driven by both legislation and an appreciation of the business benefits such as greater staff retention and productivity is required. These practices should also recognise the important role that males play in family life.

Alliance supports the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UN Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and in particular, supports measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making.
Alliance supports statutory funding to increase women’s capacity to participate at leadership levels within society and would instigate a review of the operation of the Assembly to ensure that it is an attractive option for women and indeed all individuals with family and caring commitments.

Alliance advocates a comprehensive review of childcare provision on a UK basis to ensure that sufficient support is in place to allow those who wish to progress their careers can do without disadvantaging their family lives.

Alliance supports 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.

**Alliance will work to ensure that during the process of welfare reform the needs of women and children who have experienced domestic violence are considered.** We support calls for Social Security Agency to urgently address their policies and procedures on the processing and payment of benefits in respect of women who have experienced domestic violence.

Alliance supports the work of Women’s Aid to provide refuge for all women who are victims of domestic violence, including those who have no or limited access to public funds.

**Men**

Alliance is extremely concerned that the mental health issues for men of all ages are often not brought to the fore until it is too late. In Northern Ireland there is a mental health legacy from the Troubles. While this applies equally to women, young men in particular are unable and unwilling to recognise and address mental health issues.

We would develop a Men’s Health and Well-Being policy to raise awareness of the male health issues.

Alliance will ensure that men have a bigger role to play in family life, including through flexible working and leave.

Alliance will support the development of initiatives that strategies and provide sufficient resources to pilot new approaches to engaging men in adult education programmes and improving the educational outcomes for young men.

Alliance believes that there is a need to promote the recruitment and retention of male workers in ‘non-traditional’ professions - especially teachers in nursery and primary schools, family and childcare work, work with vulnerable adults, and the nursing profession.
Housing

Alliance believes that access to adequate housing is a fundamental human right. Approximately 40,000 people are on the social housing waiting list and the current Social Housing Development Programme represents only 50% of the estimated need.

As a result of the economic downturn many families and individuals are at risk of losing their home. Alliance wants to ensure that policies are in place that supports people who are at risk of losing their home and provide a good range of safe and affordable housing options.

Quality, affordable housing options

It is becoming increasingly difficult for people to own their own homes. For many, this option will never be a reality. It is therefore vital that alternative, realistic housing options are available to individuals and families who cannot, or choose not to, buy. Alliance proposes the following policy initiatives to address housing need:

✔ making an on-going commitment to capital investment for new social housing;
✔ Introducing mandatory private landlord registration, including active promotion and compliance monitoring.
✔ extending decent homes standards to private rented housing, including reference to thermal comfort standard;
✔ ensuring adequate tenancy support in the private rented sector is available to anyone who needs it; and
✔ supporting independent housing advice services.

Our proposals on creating shared space are also relevant in this regard.

Support people at risk of losing their homes

We believe it is critical that the following safety nets are put in place to help mitigate the negative impact of the economic downturn on homeowners and tenants locally. A number of measures are necessary, including:

✔ seeking to support householders when their homes are at risk of repossession to stay in their homes, by examining the feasibility of a Preventing Possession Fund similar to those in operation in Scotland and England;
✔ providing access to independent advice for people in mortgage/rent arrears, including ensure emergency help at court proceedings;
✔ Require fee-charging debt management companies to demonstrate quality assurance by subscribing to their industry’s codes of practice;
✔ strengthening the Pre Action Protocol for Mortgage Arrears proceedings to ensure all reasonable options to avoid possession are considered thoroughly;
✔ introducing similar Pre Action Protocols for social housing rent arrears possession proceedings to ensure eviction is always a last resort;
✔ examining the role of Discretionary Housing Payments for people at risk of eviction because of housing benefit cuts;
✔ adopting a positive approach to the assessment of homeless applications from people at risk of possession as a consequence of debt; and
✔ making affordable credit facilities more accessible (e.g. by encouraging new initiatives involving social housing providers and credit unions).
Alliance will introduce an 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. 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.
Creating a Quality Environment

Alliance believes that a quality local and global environment is integral to a good quality of life and to the economic transformation of Northern Ireland.

Actions taken by government, business, civil society, and individual people not only make a difference to protecting and enhancing our local environment, but also contribute to wider efforts to assist the global environment.

At the start of the 21st Century many countries across the world are facing up to the global consequences 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. Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland will not be immune from these changes.

The Stern Reviews have highlighted that strong and early action far outweighs the economic costs of not acting. Whilst there may be a potential cost of 1% to Global GDP in terms of dealing with climate change today, Nicholas Stern draws a stark warning of potential costs ranging between 5% and 20% of Global GDP in the future if climate change is not adequately addressed from today.

We have highlighted the new economic opportunities from a Green New Deal in our economy section. Alliance believes 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.

Alliance supports regional, national, European, and international efforts to protect the environment, including the implementation of the Rio and Kyoto Treaties. Although the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit accepted 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. While we recognise that this is an important step in addressing the issue of climate change, a more urgent international response is required and must be a top priority.

We are heavy polluters. Our over reliance on imported oil and coal and our reliance of the private car has helped to create the situation where our ecological footprint, at over 5.6 global hectares per person, is higher than England, Scotland & Wales. We are living unsustainable lifestyles.

Sustainable Development

Action must be taken to ensure development is sustainable by considering the environmental and social impacts.

Alliance supports a robust cross-Departmental and public sector wide Sustainable Development Strategy. As our recovery from the economic downturn continues we must ensure that development does not occur at the expense of our natural environment. Development that is sustainable can be mutually beneficial to both our economy and the environment. Sustainable Development should be at the heart of all levels of government.
Alliance proposes a full audit of all policy and financial levers available to government and the creation of an economic and environmental model to demonstrate how they can best be integrated to deliver sustainable development. These levers include the use of building regulations; the planning system; other regulatory instruments; grants; and rates exemptions.

**Climate Change**

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. 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. Alliance believes that Northern Ireland government should commit to making a fair and proportionate contribution to the UK Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets, required under the UK Climate Change Act. We are already behind our neighbours in setting binding targets and must act quickly.

There is strong support from a cross-section of stakeholders on the need for clarity on climate change duties and responsibilities. However, the targets currently in place and the legal framework are insufficient to effectively deliver.

**Alliance will work for the introduction of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill.** The introduction of this bill will make addressing climate change a national priority and an objective for all Ministers to take account of.

**Alliance will commit to reducing our carbon emissions by 80% by 2050, with an interim goal of 40% by 2020.** We will also support cutting fossil fuel use by 50% by 2020, as well as making our buildings more energy efficient. The development of an energy strategy, with key targets, will ensure these goals are achievable. Further detail on the energy strategy is contained in our Green New Deal section of this manifesto.

**Environmental Governance**

Environmental governance and regulation is not fit for purpose. The system of environmental regulation is not sufficiently independent from departments and agencies. It is also inefficient as it lies with a mixture of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies controlled by three government departments.

**Alliance will advocate legislation to create an Independent Environmental Protection Agency.** 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 and associated re-organisation would be offset by efficiency gains within five years. It would also reduce the risk of large infraction fines from the European over inadequate environmental management and protection.
Protecting Biodiversity and Our Environmental Assets

The environment is one of Northern Ireland’s greatest assets, from the Giant’s Causeway to the Fermanagh Lakelands. If we fail to look after this valuable asset, we risk damaging the potential to sustainably use it to support our economic development.

Whilst it may be difficult to calculate an exact figure, the health benefits are quite evident. There is a significant amount of money that could be saved from our health service, if we ensure that people have access to the exercise and recreation opportunities that our natural environment provides.

Alliance would work to enhance the monitoring and identification of existing and new Areas of Special Scientific Interest. If we do not, we could face the extinction of certain species or habitats. If we do not invest in their protection we will face large infraction fines from Europe. These areas are also some of our biggest tourist attractions such as the Giants Causeway and Rathlin Island. Protection and enhancement is therefore required to ensure they remain first class destinations going forward.

Woodland
In Northern Ireland we are vastly behind the rest of Europe in terms of woodland cover, with 6% coverage, compared to a European average of 44%. We must rectify this situation by committing to double woodland cover by 2050. We are strong supporters of the Forestry Act that was passed last year, and will work to ensure it is enforced.

Alliance advocates that the Department of Agriculture should have higher targets for woodland creation. The Executive had a target in their previous Programme for Government to create 1,650 hectares of woodland by March 2011. However, as of November 2010, only 653 hectares had been created. The Assembly must commit to achieving the targets it sets.

Alliance supports a review of the grant making process and availability of incentives aimed at increasing woodland cover; bureaucracy must not be a barrier. The development of a woodland inventory would also allow progress to be monitored.
It is important to safeguard against net area loss of ancient or long established woodland. Our area of ancient and long established woodland amounts to only 10,000 hectares. These areas should be afforded special protection, the loss of ancient and long established woodland is permanent and cannot be replaced.

**Wetlands and Waterways**

Wetlands protect us from floods, filter out pollutants, provide homes for wildlife and are a source of recreation. They deserve sustainable management.

Alliance supports the full implementation of the Water Framework Directive, ensuring maximum opportunities to protect and restore our wetlands. Ongoing investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure is also required.

Alliance supports the creation of a Marine Bill. Northern Ireland is covered by certain provisions of the UK-wide Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which 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. 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 Marine Management Organisation and a more expedient and coherent approach to the development of marine plans and marine protected areas.

**Wildlife**

Alliance will continue to work for the full protection of the Irish Hare. Alliance advocates the Irish Hare be added to the list of animals that get full protection to combat its decreasing numbers. In the last Assembly we voted in favour of bans on hare coursing. Alliance will work to ensure these bans are enforced. We would fight against any move to cull the badger population to combat TB.

Alliance remains committed to a ban on the hunting of mammals with dogs.

Alliance will support a ban on the use and sale of snares.

We also call for the issue of trade in wild primates for research to be addressed.

**Planning**

Alliance favours balanced development that creates new investment, prosperity and homes, while respecting both the environment and our built heritage.

We are concerned at the lack of proper planning frameworks and the particular absence of up to date Area Plans. Alliance remains 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. It is important to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is put in place before new major housing developments commence. 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.
The context for planning has now changed with the passage of the recent Planning Bill, including the prospect of planning powers being transferred back to District Councils. Alliance believes that it is important that the revised governance arrangements set out in the local government section of this manifesto are implemented, and that proper training is provided to councillors.

**Alliance supports a more streamlined and less complex planning system.** Development is currently regulated by a considerable number of Planning Policy Statements. This system is overly complex and does not offer a clear or concise system of regulations, with tendencies to confuse applicants and objectors.

**Alliance believes that those developments that have clear economic benefits should receive accelerated passage through the planning system.** This is not about rebalancing the planning system in favour of development, but rather expediting critical decisions. It is important than investors have certainty and are not left to wait for prolonged periods while decisions are made. Achieving this outcome requires commitment of resources to ensure that balanced decisions can be taken.

**There should be greater protection for historical buildings and areas such as green belts.** Our coastline and countryside should be afforded better protection from inappropriate over-development. Out of town development should only be given approval as part of an overall strategic plan, balancing economic growth with a commitment to maintaining the character of our local towns and villages.

**Alliance supports the introduction of a limited and qualified right of Third Party Appeal.** There is strong support for the introduction of Third Party Appeals (TPA) from the public, community interests; and environmental NGOs. We believe the introduction of TPA would create more balanced decisions; protect the rights of a range of groups; and increase accountability.

We fully understand the need for caution if introducing TPA, to balance the right of individuals and other third parties against the need for progress and development, especially at this time of economic uncertainty. A number of proposed measures could mitigate against frivolous or vexatious appeals, including, the introduction of a levy fee, though balance is also required so as not to overly restrict access; restricted timescales on appeal decisions; and on-going auditing of the system.

**Alliance will work to simplify flood prevention measures.** The policy area of flood prevention is currently far too complicated. We would seek to clarify responsibility for prevention and actions post flood. We will work to bring responsibility under one government department.

**Waste**

Northern Ireland is facing serious problems due to the large amount of waste that we produce. Despite improvements in recent years, overall levels of waste produced and rates of recycling remain considerably below EU average levels. Northern Ireland is running a significant risk of incurring heavy infraction fines from Europe for not meeting EU Landfill Directive targets. Alliance remains committed to investing in the delivery of waste management plans, including supporting a hierarchy of options for reducing, reusing and recycling waste, to meet these targets.
Delivering a Green New Deal

The adoption of a Green New Deal offers an opportunity to tackle environmental, economic and social issues facing our society.

In Northern Ireland we are almost completely dependant on imported fossil fuels to meet our energy needs and we rely heavily on oil, an unregulated and rapidly depleting finite resource. This presents a number of risks for the future growth of our economy.

We are heavy polluters, lead unsustainable lifestyles and contribute disproportionately to climate change. As a consequence of our energy use and sources of supply, our energy costs are high and will continue to grow.

The impact of rising fuel costs has translated into higher bills for consumers and we have the highest levels of fuel poverty in the UK. Households spend twice as much of their disposable income on energy than households in London and around 60% more than the UK average.

Fuel poverty is not a phenomenon restricted to people dependant on benefits (although they are at greatest risk); the vast majority of homes in fuel poverty are owner occupied. Energy costs are also impacting on the competitiveness of our businesses, and are often cited by businesses as their greatest competitive disadvantage.

The Green New Deal is not purely about improving our green credentials and creating a more sustainable energy supply and demand network. It also offers the Executive a viable job and wealth creation opportunity, this of particular relevance in this climate of austerity and rising levels of unemployment.

Potential employment opportunities range from high tech manufacturing jobs, to maintenance jobs at wind power plants or in sustaining and growing employment in the agricultural sector through biomass production. Research has indicated that targeted investment and growth of the renewable sector could potentially create up to 30,000 jobs. In the short-term the retrofitting of our existing housing stock, through the implementation of cost effective energy efficient measures, would create and sustain jobs within the construction sector. Opportunities for job creation have already been realised by a number of local businesses, including Harland and Wolff. These jobs represent only a fraction of what could be achieved if a co-ordinated and ambitious approach is adopted by the Executive.

Our potential to generate renewable energy is clear. Northern Ireland has the second best potential for wind energy in Europe (second only to Scotland), we have the opportunity to secure our future energy needs from local resources.

We are already behind our neighbours and European and international competitors. Around the world, investment in the green economy was a feature of the fiscal stimuli deployed by a considerable number of governments in the aftermath of the global economic downturn of 2008. In the United Kingdom, around 7% of the £20 billion December 2008 stimulus was directed towards the green economy and Scotland has been investing heavily in the development of the Green Economy. However, the outgoing Executive passed up the opportunity to make similar investments when Barnett consequentials were passed on to it.
As such, there is a danger that Northern Ireland could slip behind international best practice and miss opportunities for economic growth. We urge the Executive to urgently prioritise this agenda. It is vital that Northern Ireland becomes a ‘leader not a follower’ in the development of green jobs and expertise.

Creating a Green, Sustainable Energy Supply

Government as the facilitator of change
Alliances calls upon the incoming Executive to display leadership around the green economy, through making its development a key cross-cutting priority within the next Programme for Government. The Executive must send a signal that Northern Ireland is open and ready for green business and ensure that the population is aware of the need for investment and the development of new infrastructure.

In doing this, the Executive should develop as a matter of urgency an overall strategy for the development of the green economy. This strategy should not only draw together existing policy levers and initiatives but also identify gaps and seek to address these gaps.

Government should obtain a clear understanding of:
1 where Northern Ireland stands in comparison to other jurisdictions;
2 the current policies and programmes available, and their inter-relationship;
3 benchmarking the current policies and funding programmes of the Executive matching up to other jurisdictions; and
4 the opportunities to go further than others, and to become a leader in the green economy.

The key roles for Government include setting realistic targets for progress, encouraging the development of local markets, and investing in the necessary infrastructure.

There is a clear need for co-ordinated action as no single department has at its disposal the policy levers to ensure the step change required. The commitment within the Strategic Energy Framework (SEF) to encourage cross-departmental working is welcome but inadequate. Currently no clear ‘road-map’ exists on how the current targets within the SEF will be achieved and how each sector will contribute to achieving these targets. This is a significant weakness and failure to allocate responsibility and action represents a ‘get out clause’ for key sectors and could result in a missed opportunity for our economy.
Alliance calls for the formation of a Green Economy taskforce to bring together all the relevant Departments with representatives from the business community, the environmental sector, and civil society and ensure a single joined up approach is taken.

**Embedding a commitment in legislation**

Northern Ireland has tremendous potential in renewables, in particular through wind and tidal power. However, we are not fulfilling our potential and are lagging behind our competitors.

Research completed by the Carbon Trust indicates, with high level of investment and the development of renewables, there is the potential to create between 8,470 and 33,124 jobs.

The enshrining of targets within a Northern Ireland specific Climate Change Bill (contained in our section on Creating a Quality Environment), will drive development. Legislation is also required to address issues to create a competitive framework for the development of a vibrant and competitive renewable energy sector; no primary legislation on renewable energy policy exists here.

**Alliance will bring forward a Renewable Energy Support Bill.** The introduction of the Energy Act 2008 in Great Britain, and several other complementary pieces of legislation enacted or proposed either in the Republic of Ireland, has resulted in a framework that cannot adequately compete in attracting investment in renewable energy. 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.

**Alliance will work towards the creation of a long term 40 year energy strategy, to provide a clear ‘road map’ toward addressing the challenge.** Currently no clear ‘roadmap’ exists on how the current targets will be achieved and how each sector will contribute to achieving these targets. This is a significant weakness and failure to allocate responsibility and action represents a ‘get out clause’ for key sectors and could result in a missed opportunity for our economy.

**Creating the right funding environment**

Alliance calls upon the Executive to ensure that available resources are leveraged as much as possible to ensure maximum impact and reach. Additional sources of finance include the European Investment Bank, commercial and social finance institutions, with mechanisms such as pay as you save schemes potentially offering an alternative to a grant driven approach.

**Alliance will give strong consideration of the introduction of system of Feed-In Tariffs.** Such a system would in particular assist an increase in smaller renewable schemes through providing a guaranteed price for power. This system could sit alongside and in conjunction with the Renewable Obligation duties placed upon power generators.
Updating our energy infrastructure
In tandem with expanding renewable energy provision it is vital that the adsorption of this energy is possible. This requires the development of the grid to support new technologies and variances in supply. 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.

We support investment in the electricity grid, ongoing development of the single energy market on the island of Ireland and the development of the north-south interconnector. We also support the proposed EU-wide renewable energy super-grid.

Alliance supports the implementation of smart grid pilot zone. A smart grid is essential in ensuring that our infrastructure is capable of carrying and supporting renewable energy and if developed at a competitive pace would also provide the opportunity for us to be leaders in what is a highly exportable area of expertise.

Aligning our regulatory framework
Alliance is committed to the provision of efficient planning system operating to clear and consistent standards to facilitate investment in renewables. The current slow pace of the planning system and the uncertainty around decisions places us at a competitive disadvantage in investment terms. While we have a good approval rate for development that supports renewable energy production from wind, we have an uncompetitive time lag between submission and consent.

Alliance also believes that energy needs also should be reflected in Regional Development Strategy, with designated Renewable Energy Zones.
**Promoting Improved Energy Efficiency**

At the core of a Green New Deal is improved energy efficiency. Improved energy efficiency is the quickest, most cost effective means of reducing demand for energy, emissions and household bills and has a short lead in time in terms of job creation. Reducing demand also reduces the investment required in renewable energy provision. It is estimated that the implementation of cost efficient measures could reduce final energy demand by up to one-third overall, with the domestic sector capable of making a saving of up to 37%, the service sector 21%, industry 23% and transport 35%.

**Public Sector**

*We call on the public sector to show leadership.* Improved energy efficiency would not only reduce the proportion of public money spent on energy but may also help to drive down the cost of technologies for homes and business. In 2007/08, the public sector annual energy bill exceeded £130 million, with savings of around 20% possible, this would represent a significant year on year saving.

A number of best practice examples exist in this area including the use of wind turbine technology by Antrim area hospital and the increased use of combined heat and power systems. The ongoing role out of the CRC (Carbon Reduction Commitment) Energy Efficiency Scheme, a new cap and trade scheme, designed to create a shift in awareness, behaviour and infrastructures, will also contribute to energy efficiency within the public sector, but it is vital that a coordinated approach with challenging targets is adopted by the Executive.

The creation of a zero carbon public sector estate by 2015 was stated within the 2006 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), this target will not be met and the absence of a target for the public sector within the current SDS is disappointing. **Alliance calls for the re-statement of a target to achieve a zero carbon public sector estate.**

To support this, we believe that the remit of the Carbon Trust should be extended to include the public sector, as is the case throughout the rest of the UK. We believe that all public buildings should aim to become ‘A’ rated within the next term of the Assembly, displaying this through Display Energy Certificates (DECs) to raise public awareness of energy use and to inform visitors to public buildings about the energy use of a building.

It is vital that when procuring new capital builds that the public sector examines the total cost of the building, taking into consideration the running and operational costs of the development, particularly energy costs and the implications of future carbon pricing regimes. We must commit to the development of sustainable, energy efficient buildings.

**Business**

Improving energy efficiency in businesses is both an economic and environmental imperative. Poor awareness and a lack of understanding within the business sector, of the relatively cost effective measures that they can take to reduce their fuel use, acts as a barrier to uptake. Alliance supports the work of the Carbon Trust in raising awareness and increasing uptake in energy efficiency measures. Through the Carbon Trust, Invest NI has access to detailed sector specific information that if disseminated could quickly and cost effectively reduce energy costs for business. It is vital that the reach and impact of this information is maximised. Alliance also supports the ongoing roll-out and uptake of the Carbon Footprint mark.
Domestic
With the domestic sector accounting for 44% of our energy use, tackling energy efficiency in our homes should be a key priority of government. Ninety percent of houses fall short of best energy performance standards and 137,000 homes fail to meet the Decent Homes standard. Currently 75,000 of our homes have no cavity wall insulation, 30,000 have no loft insulation and 220,000 have no or partial double glazing. Of the 500,000 homes using oil, around 400,000 have older, inefficient boilers. These are the types of problems that need to be addressed if we are to reduce our dependency on fossil fuel, reduce fuel poverty and create a more sustainable society.

In the short-term the retrofitting of our existing housing stock, through the implementation of cost effective energy efficient measures, would create and sustain jobs within the construction sector.

Including the Warm Home Scheme, the Government spends some £70 million per annum on energy efficiency measures. We welcome the fact that this funding is available and the consideration of a supplier obligation noted within the SEF. However, we call on the Executive to leverage this funding to ensure maximum impact and value for money.

A recent report issued by the Green New Deal Group has put forward proposals for a total investment package of £235 million over four years, they estimate that two thirds of the required funding can come from non-governmental sources leaving a commitment of only £70 million to be found from the block grant. The release of a small investment today will deliver significant savings within a very short timeframe. Benefits could include:

• a minimum of 2,300 jobs over three years;
• significant funding and investment leveraged off the back of government resources;
• household savings of £320 per annum; and
• 50,000 homes lifted out of fuel poverty.

The funding of the Green New Deal Group’s Housing Project is not yet secured. **Alliance will support and fund the Green New Deal Group housing proposal.** We will allocate Barnett Consequentials and funds available through Monitoring Rounds.

**Other Measures**
There are other measures that can be taken to support energy efficiency in all buildings

**Alliance supports the full roll-out of smart meters.** They have been shown to be a success throughout Europe in changing people’s pattern and levels of energy use.

**Alliance also supports the further tightening of building regulations to promote energy efficiency, including requiring compliance with Point 6 on the Code of Sustainable Homes by 2016.** This would entail that all new homes and communities would be zero-carbon from then onwards. This could include either individual or collective micro-generation schemes.
Providing Sustainable Transport Solutions

Northern Ireland needs an efficient and effective transport infrastructure. This is important both for local residents and workers, and for the future development of the local economy. Transport is a cross cutting theme effecting all departments. When public transport is not effective it negatively impacts on all aspects of life.

Over the years, government has invested in our road infrastructure. Road infrastructure was important as it connected our towns and cities and helped to make the land-based transport network work effectively and efficiently. However the focus on road infrastructure has created the car dependant society in which we live. There is an imbalance within the transport budget, with the roads budget taking precedence to the detriment of an integrated, inclusive public transport network.

82% of the total distance travelled is by car and around 7% on public transport, with the rest made up of taxis, walking and motor cycles. This over reliance on the private car as a mode of transport has lead to a number of problems: Northern Ireland has the highest carbon footprint in the UK; the nature of our local transport system is a major contributor to this accounting for approximately 28% of Northern Ireland’s green house gas emissions.

Our over reliance on the private car is also contributing to fuel poverty. An average household with an income of £23,000 per year currently spends 15% of their income on car fuel (based on £1.35 cost per litre). Northern Ireland homes can no longer continue to afford such an expense when every aspect of life is becoming more and more expensive. We can help save households costly travel costs by providing an inclusive public transport network.

Our over dependency on the car is also leading to congestion and this congestion is costing the economy. The current cost of congestion to the economy is around £250 million annually or 1.5% of total economic productivity. This figure is expected to grow with increased vehicle numbers and journeys.

Transport Funding

Redirecting funding toward public transport

Funding on transport is heavily skewed toward the roads infrastructure. With approximately two-thirds of funding directed to private transport and one-third to public transport, this split sits at odds with the spending patterns in most European countries.

While we understand the importance of infrastructure to private sector growth and development, the current balance of funding fails to address the long term needs of the population. We argue that in order to provide a sustainable transport solution, the balance of funding must shift in favour of public transport.
In addition, a disproportionate 86% of the Department’s capital budget goes towards roads. Of the total roads allocation, 70% is going to two projects: the A5 and the A8. The scale of those schemes means that there is no scope for allocation towards other necessary major road schemes, such as the A2, A6 and the York Street flyover among others. A clear rationale and economic argument must be presented for these investment decisions. It may also be possible for the Department to reconsider specifications, timings and project costs to ensure maximum value for money at this time of economy prosperity.

**Alliance is committed to rebalancing the funding for transport in favour of public transport.** At present, the Department of Regional Development is going in the opposite direction with reductions in funding directed to public and community transport services. A reduction on the subsidy for public transport is likely to lead to increased fares and a decrease in services. Sadly, public transport cuts will have a far-reaching effect on the most vulnerable in our society, namely, older people, disabled people, young people, women, and the unemployed.

It is vital that the budget considers the balance of costs versus benefits of a reduction in public transport funding, pedestrian walkways and cycle lanes versus road building.

**‘Sweating’ our transport resources**

Often our transport resources are not used to their full capacity and this comes with a financial cost. For example it costs approximately £150 per day for a community mini-bus to sit idle and with the vast majority of the Education and Library Board ‘Yellow’ buses idle at weekends, this is a poor use of investment and of public money. By ‘sweating the resources’ we can work more cleverly to create solutions without having to invest in the purchase of new vehicles.

**Alliance calls for DHSSPS, DE and DRD to conduct a cross-departmental review of all transport expenditure in order to identify potential for sharing resources.** Sharing resources creates clever and innovative solutions without the need to invest in capital purchases, thereby saving money for the three Departments while improving access for all.

**Planning Considerations: integrating our transport needs**

Over-reliance on cars as a principle means of transport and existing planning arrangements damages the environment and encourages non-sustainable lifestyles.

**Alliance calls for the use of Smart Growth plans ensuring the integration of sustainable transport within land use policies.** Compared to the rest of the UK, there has been much less integration of sustainable transport and land use planning policies. Sprawl and under-investment can lead to segregation for many in society resulting in increased public expenditure on education, health, services and facilities, not to mention the dilution of a ready available workforce to attract investment. ‘Smart Growth’ plans will not only make housing more affordable, public services less costly and more convenient but also will protect natural havens outside urban centres.

Particular attention should be given to transport proposals that support the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan’s employment initiatives and accessibility and promote smart growth design principles for the future. This is particularly important in new development areas with an expected increase in population figures, such as the Titanic Quarter.
It is vital that residential planning should not force anyone into car ownership and should work towards considerations for a post-carbon society by avoiding the siting of essential services on the outskirts of towns or the centralisation of all services away from local communities.

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 recognise that government must commit to the provision for a comprehensive public transport network before widespread congestion charging schemes will be tolerated.

**Improving the Attractiveness of Public Transport**

We will work to improve the public’s perception and attitudes towards the use of public transport. To support this it is vital that we continue to invest in a modern accessible public transport system, to increase accessibility and limit price rises. Appropriate investment is also required in marketing and public transport promotion to ensure the public are made aware of the savings that can be made by moving from private car to public transport.
To improve accessibility and use all travel information should include information in other languages and be available in Braille, audio and large print.

The recent investment in new train stock for Translink is a step in the right direction, but this must be matched by invested that allows for good service frequency and fare levels that encourage use.

**Alliance would prioritise funding within the railway budget to improve journey times and comfort and reduce emissions levels of the trains.** Upgrades to the Belfast to Londonderry/Derry line would be desirable dependent upon an economic appraisal.

### Integrating our Transport Network

We call for improved integration between public transport systems to create links between the bus and rail network, private car users and our airports and ports. Inter-modal transport options are ideal to discourage private transport, to promote public transport and to ease urban congestion.

We call for enhanced park and ride facilities at bus and rail stations to encourage uptake of public transport, to enable commuters the opportunity to avail of alternative modes to travel into larger towns and cities. As of 2008, there were 20 Park & Ride facilities at railway stations and bus stations under the concern of Translink. There needs to be more joined-up park and ride schemes to encourage more people to use these schemes. **Alliance supports the ongoing development of park and ride schemes.**

**Alliance will support a rapid transit system in Belfast.** However, it would have to be part of an integrated transport strategy and its development should not be at the cost of current public transport funding. Alliance favours a road based system and believes there are a number of key factors that should underpin the investment decision: economic payback must be maximised (including opportunities for job creation, reduced cost for commuters); the development should connect with wider transport routes e.g., the West Way and Titanic Quarter; it should protect access to walking and cycling routes (retaining or enhancing current provision such as the Comber Greenway); and it must act as a viable alternative to the private car.

Alliance believes that there is a need to encourage cross-city forms of public transport within our cities to fully reflect work and social patterns.

Alliance calls for public transport considerations to be included in the decision making process for new housing developments. The needs of local communities should be tailored when making new public transportation decisions which would deliver social, economic and environmental benefits to society.

**Alliance supports the call by some communities for the introduction of residents-only parking schemes.** This will ensure that inner city and town residents have the ability to park outside their house while also pushing people towards public transport.
Maintaining a universal public transport system

Research has indicated that 90% of the population is impacted by a lack of proximity to services. The ongoing centralisation of health and education centres makes accessing services more difficult especially for individuals in isolated rural areas.

Protections must be put in place through contract conditions to ensure people in rural areas and people with disabilities are not adversely affected by cuts to the transport budget. There is a real fear that with budget constraints vulnerable people living along rural routes will see a decrease in service provision as public transport seeks to only deliver in economically advantageous areas.

Access to health

Alliance proposes DHSSPS and all other Departments review transport budgets to ensure public transport can deliver appropriate services to link people to essential Health appointments. Due to increasing pressures on budgets, DHSSPS have initiated a review of all provision of non-emergency health transport. The DHSSPS will no longer provide transport assistance for people to attend outpatient or inpatient hospital appointments. DHSSPS officials propose it has never been the Department’s statutory responsibility to provide transport for people who do not have a clinical need, however, clinical need has never been defined or published. Being able to access Health contributes to an inclusive society. It is vital to consider the impact major changes to procedures will have on both the community and other resources.

Alliance supports a review of the cost of ‘Do Not Attend’ and ‘Cannot Attend’ patients to ascertain the impact of lack of suitable transport in this issue.

Supporting rural communities

Public transport is limited to delivering services mainly along arterial routes and where and when that route is economically viable. The level of rural deprivation caused through lack of appropriate transport is creating an urban/rural division. There must be clear consideration of the needs of people living in our rural areas to ensure appropriate access to public transport. Our call for the rural proofing of policies within is central to making this a reality.

Walking and Cycling

In Northern Ireland, 28% of all journeys less than one mile and 67% of journeys between one and two miles are made by car. The Regional Transportation Strategy recognises the importance of walking and contains measures to make it easier for all to walk by providing good and accessible infrastructure.

Alliance supports the continued provision and maintenance of cycle lanes on our roads. We recognise the importance of safe road use. In particular, we believe there is a need to educate children in the safe use of roads. We therefore propose primary schools include cycling proficiency as part of the physical education curriculum.
**Wider Transport Issues**

**Alliance supports a 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.

**Alliance will lobby for a revised Aviation Strategy for the United Kingdom.** Aviation policy is not currently devolved to the 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.

Alliance supports the inclusion of road safety training and advice as part of primary school curriculum in order to improve road safety awareness and reduce the number of children killed or injured on our roads.

Alliance supports the inclusion for Transport/Driver Education in secondary schools to make teenagers aware of road safety at a time before they learn to drive. Part of this scheme will be to provide alternatives to taking the car, teaching teenagers earlier how they can reduce carbon emissions.
Agriculture and Rural Development

We are committed to creating vibrant rural communities, in which a strong and sustainable agricultural sector co-exists alongside efforts to protect the landscape and biodiversity, where opportunities for jobs are realised through new forms of wealth creation such as renewable energy and tourism, and the population has access to high quality services.

Creating a competitive and sustainable agricultural sector

Agriculture continues to be a significant industry. The sector is one of the biggest employers, employing just short of 50,000 people. The agri-food industry in particular is an innovative and key growth sector and one that we have highlighted as having the potential for growth and sustained job creation. Detail on the important role that we see for the food and drinks industry is outlined in economy section of the manifesto.

The agricultural industry faces a range of challenges within the context of increased trade liberalisation, increased competition, climatic implications, future price volatility on world markets and the generally poor global economic position. It is vital that our sector is given the support that it needs to compete within this environment and is encouraged to enter into new markets.

European Policy and CAP Reform

The forthcoming reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in 2015 is a key challenge. Alliance will support reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to ensure a long term sustainable agriculture sector. Single Farm Payments (SFP) support the sustainability of many farms. In 2009, there were 39,080 SFP beneficiaries within Northern Ireland who collectively received payments in excess of £300 million. It is vital that the Department recognises the importance of the Single Farm Payment and engages in a timely fashion to influence the debate at both a national and European level.

We will work with Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs at Westminster to influence the outcome of the review of CAP to secure a fair and proportionate share of the CAP budget for Northern Ireland, to ensure that the CAP contains sufficient flexibility to allow us to tailor measures to meet our specific needs, and to simplify the CAP.

Alliance will work in collaboration with Scotland and Wales to ensure that the particular needs of the regions are reflected in the UK CAP position.

We support the concept of active farmers and efforts to ensure that funding supports a sustainable vibrant sector.

We will continue to support engagement with the high level export group on milk, to influence decisions around the abolition of the milk quota in 2015. It is vital that any changes stabilise markets and producers’ incomes and enhance transparency.
Supporting Research and Innovation, and Technology Transfer
Encouraging research and innovation is a key aspect of ensuring the ongoing competitiveness and growth of the sector. Product and process research and innovation must be supported at both producer and processor levels.

The agriculture sector invests heavily in research and development and in growing skills. Both the Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute (AFBI) and the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) are highly regarded institutions. It is vital that there is on-going collaboration between these organisations and the wider business base and skills providers to ensure the sector is embedded within economic development. Technology transfer and information sharing must be a key element of the strategy to ensure that ideas, processes and product development make it from the classroom to the farm.

Alliance supports the inclusion of AFBI and CAFRE in key business and college/university collaboration funds.

Eradicating Disease
Alliance calls for the development of a comprehensive animal and plant disease management strategy with the objective of eradicating disease in Northern Ireland. This strategy must address the impact of disease while at the same time recognising the need to protect our indigenous wildlife.

A Fair Deal for Farmers
Alliance will work to ensure a higher degree of Retailer Social Responsibility toward primary producers. In addition, we will continue to work at Westminster for the introduction of a supermarket adjudicator. It is vital that we support farmers in securing a fair market price for agricultural products within local markets.

Alliance supports greater awareness of Northern Ireland produce within local markets. This can support the local economy as well as reduce our carbon footprint.

Creating and Promoting a Quality Brand
There is still considerable debate on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in terms of their potential benefits or risks. The technology is so new that there is very little longitudinal and independent evidence. We recognise that attitudes toward GM foods and cereal production are changing throughout the world; with a large proportion of our animal feeds imported. It is vital that traceability remains an essential part of EU law to enable the monitoring and checking of food and feed labelling. In Northern Ireland we currently have no agreed Government position on GMOs.

Alliance supports an island of Ireland free from the cultivation of GM plants. As in Scotland and Wales, the Executive should explore the options to secure the devolution of these powers around GM. Utilising the provisions of the Subsidiarity Protocol within the Lisbon Treaty is one such mechanism. We believe that this is vital given the border and the need to retain consistency on an all Ireland basis.

We endorse the efforts of the Food Standards Agency to improve food labelling policy.

Alliance will promote the highest standards of agriculture. We need to move away from commodity production, and develop niche markets, including organic foods, building on our existing green image.
Creating Clarity, Reducing Bureaucracy
A restructuring of government departments will also benefit the agricultural sector. In the interim Alliance will work to bring about greater co-ordination between DARD and the Department of the Environment over agri-environment and planning policies and between DARD and DETI on energy issues. This manifesto contains further detail on our proposed reforms to government.

Alliance will work to ensure that money directed towards agri-environmental schemes directly benefit farmers. Modulated funds should not be used for other aspects of departmental expenditure.

Alliance will also work to reduce bureaucracy in funding applications for the industry. Alliance supports calls to codify all existing regulations into a single web site, categorised around events in the lifetime of the farm. We will also seek ways to reduce and improve the efficiency of regulations.

In line with our wider efforts to create a more responsive public sector, Alliance calls for market testing and benchmarking within the front line services supported by DARD. In particular it is estimated that improved delivery of animal health and veterinary services could lead to savings of £25 million over a four year period.

We support the on-going work of the DARD Direct, and the need to regionalise public sector employment, where possible. However efforts to rationalise services and management under DARD Direct must be in place before a decision on the size and location of DARD HQ is made.

Creating Vibrant Rural Communities
Rural communities are under threat, many farms fail to provide an income for farm families, there can be limited job opportunities and often rural communities have poor access to services that support the most vulnerable in society. We must put in place structures that support vibrant and dynamic rural communities, open up employment opportunities in tourism, niche trade and renewables, and also create access to essential services through innovative and collaborative service delivery.

Alliance will work for the finalisation and implementation of the Rural White Paper and its associated action plan. This is vital to ensure delivery of a joined up, comprehensive and long-term strategic approach to support our rural communities.
Creating Jobs and Sustaining Communities

Renewable energy production should be actively promoted as a viable source of diversification for many farms. It offers an opportunity to generate income and employment and secure the future sustainability of many rural communities. It is vital that the potential within the sector to contribute toward the growth of sustainable energy production is realised. Diversification opportunities include the growth of willow, local heating and micro-generation solutions, and anaerobic digestion. The adoption of energy solutions also offers an opportunity to reduce the carbon footprint of the agricultural sector and provides the industry with greater control over the fuel aspect of input prices. In addition, Alliance will explore ways in which farmers can produce environmental benefits while increasing farm income.

Alliance calls for an increased focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy production within the funding of the Rural Development Programme. The effective management of the sector’s contribution to energy production is also required; it is vital that the sector does not solely become a commodity supplier within the energy food chain.

We will work to initiate a re-examination of the Rural Planning strategy, to promote balanced development, including farm diversification, in rural areas.

Sustainable and Accessible services

Alliance will support the implementation of an enhanced rural proofing process across all Departments to ensure that all major policies and strategies are assessed to determine whether they have a differential impact on rural areas and, where appropriate, make adjustments to take account of particular rural circumstances.

We will support the rollout of the Next Generation Broadband Project, to extend access to high speed broadband services to 85% of rural and urban businesses.

We will examine innovative, joined up and cross-border approaches to the provision of services for rural areas, in particular rural healthcare. Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) is a good example of cross border joined up thinking on healthcare across Cavan, Sligo and Enniskillen. Community and partnership development as evidenced through Health Action Zones as well as ‘Healthy Living Centre’ models demonstrate good practice through an integrated approach to healthcare.

We will also work to ensure coordination and integration between existing services such as the rural bus routes funded under the Rural Transport Fund and the Community Transport Schemes. Flexible use of services and buildings must be encouraged to ensure that vital services can be sustained.

Re-skilling and up-skilling of farm families is a necessity, our detailed proposals in the skills section will help to secure this. The on-going work of Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme is vital in this respect, and it is critical that this investment secures a change in the approach to accessing skills and education by those in rural areas. Outreach by our training and education providers is also required.
The sea fishing industry and coastal communities

The sea fishing industry is a vitally important part of our coastal communities and contributes toward job and wealth creation. Alliance recognises the need to balance the protection and growth of the fishing industry with the sustainability of fishing stocks. We will support the industry at Europe in negotiations to protect quotas and fleets.

While we will work to protect the industry it is also important that our coastal communities are supported in a similar way to rural communities to diversify their industrial base. We will work to maximize the impact of the European Fisheries Fund to support our coastal communities.

We will work to influence the outcome of the Commissions work on the Cod Recovery Plan, a ‘one size fits all approach’ must be avoided.

Our industry must be supported to achieve the highest standards in quality and sustainability – our fisheries must work to be accredited to the Marine Stewardship Council accreditation, which is often a pre-requisite for market entry.

We support the ongoing work of AFBI to:
✔ produce independent scientific advice to influence the decision making process;
✔ identify alternative approaches to rebuilding depleted stocks;
✔ develop a long-term management plan for Irish sea herring and other pelagic stocks; and
✔ reduce discards.
Culture, Arts & Leisure

The Alliance Party appreciates the importance of culture, arts, sport and leisure to a healthy and vibrant civil society. There are also considerable economic and social benefits to society as a whole.

Alliance is also particularly aware of the ability of culture, the arts and language to make a positive contribution to a shared future.

Alliance supports the appreciation and expression of our rich and varied cultural identities. We believe that cultural participation and self-expression should be developed in the context of respect and understanding of our own and each other's heritage.

There is a need for a broad-based and inclusive approach to sensitive issues around culture, and to avoid cultural matters being used as a source of contention and division.

One particular challenge is to ensure that the forthcoming ‘decade of anniversaries’ on the island of Ireland are commemorated and understood within a shared and inclusive framework.

There is a need to establish an agreed strategy on how all other languages spoken and used, out of need or as form of cultural expression, can be acknowledged and supported.

Arts and Heritage

With new arts venues, renovations and redevelopments both underway and on the way, these are exciting times for the arts, and there is much to be celebrated. Arts events are now enjoyed by approximately three quarters of the population, touching hundreds of thousands of audience members from all sections of society, delivered by a diverse and innovative sector that employs tens of thousands and returns over £3 for every £1 invested in it. There is now a dedicated arts facility within 20 miles of very person. Alongside the news of capital investment in state-of-the-art premises, we also welcome the announcement that Derry is to become UK City of Culture in 2013. Alliance believes that investment in the arts should continue and efforts must be made to commercialise our cultural sector and these successes.
Alliance is committed to proper funding for the arts sector. Alliance recognises the positive impact both commercial and community arts have across key government areas, and resources should therefore be directed in a way that recognises how the positive impact of the arts cuts across Government priorities. We must ensure that funding allocated to the creative industries strikes a balance between capital investment and core funding, and reflects the diversity of arts provision across the sector and its make-up. Both the allocation and protection of funding should be subject to an impact assessment that takes into account the economic and social impact of potential decisions.

Notably, the funding of the arts at a grassroots level is essential to ensuring that local talent is developed in order for Northern Ireland to have an internationally competitive creative industries sector.

We do not believe that the arts should receive special protected status, but we do recognise that severe cuts to the arts will have a devastating impact on a sector already critically underfunded in comparison to its counterparts across the UK and Ireland.

Alliance is committed to ensuring that Arts funding is increased to at least the average spend per capita across these islands.

Alliance would establish long-term funding for the arts moving a way from year on year allocations to enable to sector to plan for the long term and reduce the administrative burden placed on both funders and recipients.

Alliance believes in continued potential for efficiencies in the delivery and administration of arts funding to reduce waste and promote savings through the efficient management and allocation of arts funding.

Alliance would ensure that sources of grant funding such as lottery fund are additional to government funding and used in the manner for which they are intended.

Alliance will establish an integrated strategy for cultural tourism. This strategy must provide a full appreciation of the unique cultural heritage products we have to offer, and how these can be developed, managed and projected to a wider audience. This can enhance Northern Ireland’s image as a quality venue and destination.

We believe the arts sector can deliver a significant return on tax payers’ investment, with many arts groups delivering big productions and big audiences through a small staff and small overheads. Many arts groups, on the tightest of budgets, and sometimes with only a skeleton staff, have demonstrated highly-innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to their governance, operations and programming, and these have proven vital components in securing the survival of many arts groups. This is precisely the kind of sustainable development that benefits our economy and must be protected.

Alliance will support measure that will secure a more sustainable future for the sector. We must create an enabling environment for a sector already punching above its weight by making the most of digital technology to promote innovation and new entrants into the arts and to give greater and more equal access to audience data.

Alliance will encourage efforts to improve business models within arts and cultural organisations in key areas such as financial management, fundraising, marketing and audience development.
Alliance supports a system of collaboration within the sector. Where possible, this should minimise the financial burden placed on the individual back office functions such as marketing, finance and human resources. Collaboration is also necessary to limit the impact of a large proportion of core funding going to a small number groups. It will also help support mentoring, the promotion of local talent and facilitate cross sectoral working.

Alliance will encourage investment in arts at a local level to maximise the benefits of capital investment in regional arts facilities.

Alliance supports the establishment of a steering group to internationalise cultural and artistic offerings. Consideration should be given to the allocation of funding toward an export strand. These measures would not only enhance the economic sustainability of the sector but would also to generate significant input into our economy. This could be done through enhanced collaboration between existing bodies, not through the costly creation of new ones. We also believe the philanthropic and sponsorship models adopted by a small number of arts groups represent a significant and underused resource and should be adopted more widely throughout the sector.

Alliance support efforts to grow audience numbers. This includes initiatives that support the widening participation agenda such as ‘Test Drive the Arts’. Growth in tickets sales is required to offset potential drops in public and private funding. Funding and targets should focus on audience growth.

Alliance would support efforts to increase the level of appreciation of, and participation in, arts, culture and leisure activities, through making them accessible and affordable to all. Alliance supports improved access to arts facilities for those who are blind or visually impaired, people who are deaf or hearing impaired, physically disabled people and people with learning difficulties. We also support a system of reductions for the unemployed, students, and elderly people.

Alliance supports and seeks to develop opportunities for business and private sector sponsorship of the arts, such as the ‘Arts and Business’ Pairing Scheme. We note the potential in this area of mutual benefit to the creative and economic health of the Province.

Alliance supports the promotion of the film industry and would also consider the introduction of a tax credit for television production similar to that used to attract the film industry.

Alliance supports a greater coverage of the arts on television and radio, with a particular reference to regionally produced work.

Decade of Anniversaries

Alliance is conscious of the political, social and potentially economic significant of the forthcoming decade of 100th anniversaries in Northern Ireland and across the island of Ireland between 2012 and 2022. While these may be a challenge to community cohesion, Alliance believes that with proper political leadership and positive approach from civil society it can help to build a shared future and indeed to accelerate the transformation of this society.

Alliance will support the rights of individuals and groups to commemorate events and facilitate exploration of history through the various forms of media.

Alliance believes that efforts should be made to channel such endeavours through a shared framework that would assist the development of mutual understanding.
Language

Alliance supports the development of a comprehensive languages strategy. 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. Alliance supports the development of British and Irish Sign Languages and the recognition and appreciation of the deaf culture.

Libraries

Libraries are not just about books, they contribute toward a range of government priorities including economic development, education, health, regeneration and social exclusion.

We believe that libraries are an important vital good and that despite facing challenges to their future operation, have the opportunity to continue to remain relevant within the digital age. However we recognise that in order for libraries to remain a feature within our cities, towns and villages the model of delivery must adapt and reflect modern needs and trends.

Alliance would enhance the Library Service and ensure its future sustainability in a number of ways. We support the standards outlined within the Delivering Tomorrow’s Libraries strategy from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. In particular that 85% of households should have access to a library service within 2 miles. Adequately resourced support initiatives such as mobile libraries, which would particularly benefit older people and those living in rural areas, should be available. We would implement a strategy to maximise access through encouraging co-location with other community services such as health, education, community provision etc – this is particularly important in rural areas and for those libraries where overheads may suggest that currently delivery is unsustainable. Finally, we would complete a review of opening hours to facilitate access for working families (weekends and evenings).

Museums

Museums are a public good, providing access to a service that is primarily funded by the government that the market would not provide if left to its own devices. Investment in museums has positive benefits on tourism, social cohesion and inclusion, education, regeneration and employment. Our museums are world class and it is vital that they remain so.

The four museums that are part of National Museums Northern Ireland, namely the Ulster Museum, the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, the Ulster American Folk Park, and Armagh County Museum attract over one million visitors a year.

Alliance would complete and implement a museums policy to support the work of National Museums Northern Ireland. This policy will reflect and include measures to realise the positive impact that a vibrant and independent museum sector can have on society and the economy.
Museums must make connecting with new audiences a core objective. We encourage partnership across the sector and with communities, academia and voluntary groups.

Co-operation between DCAL and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board should be encouraged to ensure that the tourism potential of our museums is fully realized.

Our museums are first class and to compete on an international stage museums and their management bodies should be free to determine policy and take decisions on exhibitions free from political interference.

**Sports & Leisure**

Sport and physical activity have a role in promoting health and wellbeing, both physically and mentally; promoting cohesion among communities; and boosting tourism.

Participation levels are among the lowest in the UK and steadily declining, the consequences and cost of this to society are large and unacceptable – it is estimated that around 2,000 deaths a year can be attributed to physical inactivity.

This has a knock on effect on the cost to our health service. The ‘Investing for Health’ report states that obesity is estimated to be causing around 450 deaths each year with a cost of around £500 million to the economy.

**Alliance will tackle the current decline in physical activity and promote a healthier Northern Ireland by:**

✔ supporting increased physical education at an early age in schools;
✔ encouraging local government authorities to audit and improve local facilities;
✔ setting targets for increased participation; and
✔ encouraging a joined up approach between government departments.

We will also target those sections of the community that are particularly low in participation, such as women, people with disabilities, and people from areas of social disadvantage.

These steps are consistent with an increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

We believe that any local facilities should encourage participation from all parts of the community and promote the principles of cohesion, sharing and integration.

also believes that it is important to invest in talented young people with sporting ability. We are committed to supporting the work of the Special Olympics Ulster.
**Sports Infrastructure**

The Sports Matters Strategy calls for the development of major sports stadiums to meet the strategic needs of Football, GAA and Rugby on an operationally viable and commercially sustainable basis.

The **Alliance Party remains committed to building a shared stadium for GAA, Football and Rugby**. Not only does this offer a financially sound option, but it also promotes the principal of a shared future and a cohesive community.

**We are also committed to the delivery of the Olympic standard Aquatic Centre in Bangor.**

**Alliance supports the hosting of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games in Northern Ireland and is committed to ensuring that the event is a success.**

**Inland waterways and fisheries**

Alliance calls for recognition of the needs to sustainably develop our inland waterways and fisheries - protecting and enhancing their bio-diversity while at the same time developing their recreational and leisure potential.

Alliance supports the regeneration and development of our inland waterways system, including the re-opening of the Ulster Canal. We recognise that funding needs to be explored on a partnership basis with interested bodies.

Alliance believes that improving water quality, including the revision of pollution controls, and appropriate planning measures are priorities for the effective and efficient management of inland waterways, recreational angling and commercial fisheries. We believe that increased co-operation between angling organisations and other environmental bodies would be beneficial, for example in meeting the challenge of biodiversity.

Alliance is committed to supporting the work of the North/South Body on Inland Waterways, to ensure a co-ordinated approach in border areas and to develop their potential throughout both areas.
Good Governance

Good governance is always 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.

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 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.
- Departments tend to exist within silos, and there is insufficient joined-up government and collaboration between over cross-cutting issues.

Notably, 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. In such circumstances, parties not in government would have a formal opposition status.

The amendments from the St. Andrew’s Agreement did little to address these underlying governance problems. The 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.

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.

Our rationale for reform is based on a desire to see more cohesive, collective and effective government. Furthermore, reform may save some resources directly, the major economic, financial and social benefits will be obtained from more efficient decision-making and more responsive government addressing the needs to citizens, business and civil society.

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. Other changes can be delivered through the local institutions.
Alliance has now entered government. 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. In doing so, from within, Alliance is committed to making the institutions work better, and that Ministers and Departments work in a collective manner.

**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.

Short of this outcome, Alliance believes that a number of smaller steps could be taken consistent with the current approach to the appointment of ministers that would constitute improvements.

First, the roles of First Minister and Deputy First Minister are co-equal in law and formal status. Alliance believes that this should be reflected in terms of nomenclature used. This would de-politicise what could become a potentially polarising contest over which party has a claim to First Minister and which party is relegated to Deputy First Minister. OFMDFM should remain a joint office (obviously the name of the office would change accordingly).

Second, Alliance believes that the appointment of First Minister and Deputy First Minister should be through a cross-community vote in the Assembly. Such collective legitimisation would contribute to the authority of the incumbents.
Third, while individual Ministers may continue to allocated by D’Hondt method, once a final set of nominations are in place, this package could be subject to a cross-community vote in the Assembly. This system of collective legitimisation would again contribute to the authority of the incumbents and also create a greater sense of collectivity across the team. Such a vote could follow the model of how the European Parliament collectively endorses the nominations of the European Commissioners. A negative vote could lead to a re-run of D’Hondt. However, all parties would have a massive interest in ensuring that the cohort of ministers for endorsement by the Assembly would meet with Agreement. This approach would build on the successful election of a Minister of Justice by the Assembly on a cross-community basis.

A further benefit of this approach is that it would help to combat the tendency for some Ministers to treat their Departments as independent silos. The essence of power-sharing is that decisions are taken that reflect the common good of society, and that all those in office have some influence over outcomes. It would be perverse for a situation to emerge where the decision-making and policy outcome from any Department to only reflect the positions of the particular party that happened to obtain that portfolio under the D’Hondt system. This is the essence of power-division. All parties should have a shared interest over the economy, education, health and every other policy area. Such a vote could encompass the cross-community vote for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister mentioned above or be separate to it.

**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:

1. The institutionalisation of sectarian division.
2. The inequality of votes between elected MLAs.
3. The inability to adjust to changing demographic and political circumstances.
4. 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.

**Alliance will support a rationalisation of the number of Government Departments from twelve to eight.** While we support such changes, we are realistic on the level of financial savings that can be found in this regard. Institutional reform can support difficult decisions taken in other respects but in isolation it is not sufficient to address the current financial challenge. It is estimated that saving of around £10 - £20 million per annum are achievable through a reduction in Government Departments. An even stronger justification is the benefits that could arise to the users of government services from departments with a more holistic and strategic approach to critical issues.
Alliance argues that eight Departments could be established as follows:

1. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (retaining much of its current functions).
2. Economy (incorporating the current Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Employment and Learning, and some aspects of Agriculture and Rural Development).
3. Finance and Personnel (with civil law passing to Justice and any latent responsibilities for Northern Ireland Water which would be granted mutual status).
4. Justice (receiving civil law from Finance and Public Safety from DHSSPS).
5. Health and Social Services (minus Public Safety).
6. Education (incorporating much of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure).
7. Environment and Rural Development (incorporating the current Department of the Environment, planning functions currently with the Department of Regional Development, much of Agriculture and Rural Development, and waterways from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure).
8. Urban and Social Development (with the existing urban regeneration aspects of the current Department better highlighted and Transport transferred from the current Department of Regional Development).

Alliance will promote a Governance Bill that would mandate better co-operation and collaboration between Departments. In order to better combat the silo mentality, a duty should be placed on all Departments to co-operate and collaborate to meet some general objectives. These could include promoting community safety and combating crime, promoting public health, working for sustainable development, and promoting a shared future. This would still be required notwithstanding any rationalisation of Government Departments as set out above.

Alliance supports a reduction in the size of the Assembly to 80 members. This could be initiated through the reduction in the number of constituencies as part of wider UK efforts to slim down government. This creates the potential for a smaller Assembly. On the basis of 16 constituencies, we understand that the Northern Ireland Assembly would be reduced in size from 108 (18*6) to 96 (16*6). Alliance could accept a modification of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to reduce the number of MLAs per constituency from 6 to 5. This would be based upon a call by the Assembly in response to agreement between parties and a vote in plenary session. This would provide an Assembly of 80 MLAs. This would be more in keeping with the size of Northern Ireland and the need for efficient government. Alliance would caution against going below five members per constituency. At below five, proportionality begins to be lost. This is seen in elections to the Dail, which can be on the basis of 3, 4 and 5-seat constituencies. Proportionality is particularly critical in a deeply divided society such as ours. A reduction in the number of MLAs from 108 to 75 would result in direct cost savings of £3.8 million per annum with additional indirect savings made through a reduction in other expenses such as travel, committee expenses and Assembly running costs.

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. At present, the level of the Block Grant is set independently of the relative economic performance of the economy, meaning that the Assembly has no direct incentive to prioritise the economy. This power is central to the introduction of a lower rate of Corporation Tax.
Alliance supports the full normalisation of the party donation and disclosure regime in Northern Ireland consistent with the rest of the United Kingdom. We opposed these at the outset, we believe that the arguments used to rationalise exemptions have become redundant. All donations to parties above £7,500 and to candidates/elected representatives above £1,500 should be publicly declared. This would provide people with the information to make their own judgements of the motivations of politicians and political parties with respect to the stances taken.

Given the existence of parties which cross the Irish border, Alliance believes that it is appropriate for the full provisions of Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act to apply to the UK and Ireland together, subject to parallel legislation. We are recommending this to the two Governments.

Alliance is committed to the further development of North-South and East-West co-operation. We support the continued work of the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. Alliance regards the institutional framework as a means to an end rather than the ends in themselves though we recognise their respective symbolic importance for different sections of the community.

Alliance would enthusiastically support an intensification of co-operation on a North-South and/or East-West basis. To date, too many of the meetings in institutional format have been little more than infrequent discussions with little evidence of follow-up actions. Alliance has already advocated serious consideration of the potential for shared services on a north-south basis in the Finance section of this Manifesto.

For further detail, see Alliance’s proposals for reforming governance in Northern Ireland, Agenda for Democracy: www.allianceparty.org/pages/agenda-for-democracy.html
Leading Change for Stronger Local Government

Alliance strongly supports the modernisation and strengthening of local government.

Such changes can readily be taken forward as part of the Review of Public Administration. Alliance supports the rationalisation of the number of District Councils to capture economies of scale and to provide more efficient services balanced against the need to reflect local communities and geography, facilitate civic pride, and to provide ready access for the citizen to local democratically-elected decision-makers.

We support the transfer of a range of functions from regional government to local government, and in particular welcome the creation of responsibilities in relation to community planning as well as the granting of the power of ‘general wellbeing’.

Arguably, they could and should have been introduced independently of any wider local government reform and can today be considered ahead of further changes in the context of ongoing political delays.

Alliance supports reformed decision-making procedures that both reflect the need to take into account the particular nature of Northern Ireland society, most notably the ongoing deep divisions, and provide for fair, efficient and effective decision-making.

Alliance argues for the Executive taking the final decisions to implement the Review of Public Administration.

Alliance believes that the incoming Minister for the Environment should convene talks early in the new mandate between representatives of the leading political parties and key local government stakeholders in order to find sufficient consensus on a roadmap to finally deliver the Review of Public Administration.

We are committed to the passing of a 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.

Pending the agreement on the future of the RPA, Alliance supports the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) agenda for promoting voluntary collaboration between councils around shared services.

Alliance supports an effective and flexible approach to guarantee power-sharing and co-operation in local government. Alliance has been a strong advocate of power-sharing as the most effective means to provide for governance in a divided society. Decision-making in local government, as elsewhere should be underpinned by adherence to good relations, equality, and human rights standards.
Alliance can agree that a range of different decision-making models be available to Council. Some of these may only be appropriate when Councils reach a certain threshold of responsibilities and powers and/or expenditure in either relative or absolute terms.

Proportionality should be central to the nature of representation on either a Cabinet or any committee structure, and the nature of the proportional system is central to this. Alliance advocates the use of the single transferable vote form of proportional representation (PR-STV) as the fairest means to distribute civic posts or committee places.

The traditional committee system should remain the default form of decision-making. Certain matters, such as determining civic posts, the passage of the District Rate, the assumption of additional powers and responsibilities should all be matters for the full Council.

Alliance does support the use of a set formula for the allocation of civic posts, committee chair and places. This should be defined by the Department. Councils should be established as PR-STV, which is the most flexible and fairest system. In the absence of this approach, Councils should have the freedom to adopt the system that best suits their individual circumstances, provided that there is external verification that it would not be discriminatory in its actual operation.

Alliance is rigorously opposed to the use of the D’Hondt formula and regards it as potentially discriminatory. Furthermore, it is not sufficiently flexible to accommodate to the varying local circumstances that prevail across Councils.

More generally the D’Hondt formula is flawed. First, it discriminates in favour of larger blocs. Second, it works against the interests of bodies of opinion that are more fragmented than others; there is no transferability of votes allowed that would counteract this. Third, it is prone to distorted and perverse outcomes. This risk increases when the field of application is smaller.
Alliance supports the introduction of a mandatory Code of Conduct for councillors. This should be introduced and endorsed in writing by councillors ahead of taking up office. Alliance believes that there should be an independent office to which complaints can be made, and urges that the Commissioner for Complaints would be the most appropriate office. However, we note the potential for the rationalisation of such structures in Northern Ireland within the near future.

Alliance is a strong proponent of the community planning responsibility being given to Councils. They are the best placed to identify local needs and co-ordinate with other bodies. The power and responsibility for community planning needs to be matched similar duties being placed upon other agencies of government and their local offices to engage fully within the community planning process. At its heart, community planning must extend from simply identifying needs and actions to joint delivery of goods, facilities and services. It is also critical that the community planning model fully takes into account and is reconciled with the forthcoming Police and Community Safety Partnerships, and also that good relations duties and the implementation of local aspects of a future Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration are taken into account.

Alliance strongly supports the power of ‘well-being’. This will allow councils to address all local issues that are specifically excluded by statute rather than only fulfilling those discrete functions prescribed by law. This, for example, could have been helpful in addressing the problems resulting from severe winter weather.

Alliance advocates a new Partnership Model between regional and local government. Alliance is concerned in deteriorating relationship between regional government and local government. Accordingly, we would endorse a Partnership Panel being created to help build relations and mutual confidence between the two tiers of government. A particular source of concern relates to the transfer of additional responsibilities to councils without the associated funding. Outside the context of the RPA, various Assembly Bills propose to give additional power and responsibilities to councils without the associated funding transferring. Examples include the Clean Neighbour Bill, the Dogs Amendment Bill, the Animal Welfare Bill and the Planning Bill. In certain respects asking the District Rate to generate additional revenue may not be unreasonable given the current public expenditure challenges. However, the fear is that Councils will unreasonably be challenged by Government for above inflation rises in the rate at a time when regional government is reducing costs. It is important that any such rises in rates can be properly disaggregated.
Policy responsibility for foreign affairs, defence, general European Union matters and international development are the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government. Alliance policies on these matters, including the widening and deepening of the European Union, have been set out in detail in our 2010 Westminster Election Manifesto.

However, the Northern Ireland political institutions have considerable opportunities to engage at a European and international level, to avail of opportunities offered to this region and to help other states and regions in return.

Increasingly, regions have become actors in their own right, either in conjunction with or independent of their national governments, on the international stage and in particular with the European Union.

Our relationships at an international and European level are critical for our future success. We must thrive at developing competitive international networks.

Northern Ireland can also play a role in promoting international development. In particular, as the peace process is regarded internationally as a significant success story, there remain ongoing opportunities and obligations to share such experiences. Furthermore, as a result of such success, Northern Ireland retains considerable political capital and goodwill within and across the European Union.
Relations with the European Union

Engagement through the European Union is crucial to the economic, social and environmental development of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has gained enormously from the UK’s membership of the European Union, especially in terms of financial assistance. Furthermore, Northern Ireland has benefitted significantly from access to the EU single market and the discipline of a common European approach to many transnational challenges.

Some examples of the key EU policies that impact directly upon this region include: climate change, environmental regulation including water, food labelling and safety, and the Common Agricultural Policy. European Union funding has also been critical to local economic development, training, innovation and peace and reconciliation efforts.

Notably, the majority of current public investment in addressing the divisions lies outside the Block Grant, with European Peace monies being the main aspect to this.

Networking and influencing policy

European policy shapes so much of our lives, it is vital that our Assembly works to shape the future of Europe. We must maximise the resources and expertise within the Northern Ireland office in Brussels to network and combine forces with other regions to share best practice and expertise.

Within our economic policy we have set out our policy for improved links between business and sources of innovation, such as universities and research institutes, at a local level, however it is vital that this relationship is also developed at a European level. Alliance believes that it is not just businesses that can grow and become more competitive through networking but Government can also learn and grow.

Engagement is required around the Europe 2020 Strategy, the current Budget and Legislative Programme discussions, and the future of Structural Funds beyond 2013.

Alliance endorses the current priorities for engagement around the themes of:

- **Competitiveness and Employment**, including the Single Market development, the European Social Fund, European Qualifications Framework, and the future of State Aid rules;
- **Innovation and Technology**, including the Framework 7 and Framework Programmes and the Digital Agenda;
- **Climate Change and Energy**, including the Low-Carbon Economy Road Map, Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Programme and the Common Fisheries Policy; and
- **Social Cohesion**, including Peace III and possible Peace IV, cohesion, sharing and integration work.
Maximising investment opportunities

Northern Ireland is due to receive €1.1 billion in Structural Funds during the 2007-2013 period, as well as significant further investment under the Common Agricultural Policy. While this is substantial, there is opportunity for greater investment. Using public sector funding to leverage private sector investment is crucial, untapped opportunities include the European Investment Bank, (which forms a central part of the Green New Deal proposals), JEREMIE (Joint Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises). This is particularly important given the current state of the banking sector and the lack of private sector investment market for innovative high risk ventures. The Executive should investigate opportunities to fully leverage existing funding, and implement cross departmental and area based strategies to maximise the potential of these funds.

Alliance supports the development of a strategy to increase the level of investment through greater use of loan based finance support. The Executive and our government departments must engage with the European Investment Bank to explore possibilities. Engagement with the Barroso Taskforce is central to this.

**Alliance will support the implementation of the recommendations of the Barroso Taskforce.**

**Alliance will support the creation of a PEACE IV Programme for Northern Ireland.**

**Alliance advocates that Northern Ireland should be benchmarking itself within the context of European Union against other regions.** This will give a much wider perspective of changing economic performance and increased prosperity. Such comparisons are possible through the NUTS system (nomenclature d’unités territoriales statistiques/ Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics). This comparison can be conducted at Level 1 where Northern Ireland is 1/12 UK regions and 1/97 across the European Union.
International Opportunities

As a liberal internationalist party, Alliance supports an international system based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. 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.

While foreign policy and international development remain formally the responsibility of national governments, there remains much that a region such as Northern Ireland can do, including through the Executive and the Assembly to engage internationally and to support international development.

Alliance will ensure that there is a cross-Department European and international engagement strategy.

Alliance gives a commitment to the sharing of best practice from our peace and political peace process within Europe and further afield.

Alliance will support, encourage and facilitate educational and cultural exchanges between Northern Ireland and developing countries. The role of the British Council is particularly relevant in this regard.

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