

Manifesto Watch

Assembly Elections 2016



With the 2016 Assembly Elections almost upon us, the Human Rights Consortium takes a look at the manifestos of the various political parties who have put themselves forward for election.

This resource will look at a number of issues related to human rights and equality.

It will examine issues key to the Consortium's work; a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, as well as any comments on the Human Rights Act.

The resource will examine human rights and equality issues in relation to: Freedom of Assembly; Abortion; Marriage Equality; LGB&T issues; Racism; Discrimination; Disability; Employment; Homelessness; and the Living Wage.

Within a political sphere, it will review any information provided by parties in relation to the reform of Stormont, or political reform.

More broadly, it will detail any notable promises or mentions in relation to Health; Education; the Environment; and Justice.

The full election manifestoes of the parties can be read by clicking on their name.

[Alliance Party](#)

[Democratic Unionist Party](#)

[Green Party](#)

[Northern Ireland Conservative Party](#)

[Sinn Féin](#)

[Social Democratic & Labour Party](#)

[Traditional Unionist Voice](#)

[United Kingdom Independence Party](#)

[Ulster Unionist Party](#)

[Workers Party](#)

Bill of Rights

There are a number of mentions of a specific Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The **SDLP** says it will continue to campaign for an NI specific Bill of Rights to protect, strengthen and uphold the social, cultural and economic rights we currently enjoy.

Alliance is open to persuasion on an NI Bill of Rights, but acknowledge they must be convinced why NI needs a separate human rights regime from other jurisdictions. Any Bill of Rights must be enforceable through our own courts; flexible to take into account changing circumstances; and inclusive in that it does not entrench notions of separate communities.

The **Workers Party** call for the introduction of a Bill of Rights without delay. It must form the cornerstone of democracy as the guarantor of the civil liberties of all citizens and of the political rights of all political parties, groups and individuals prepared to work through the democratic process. It is also one of the 10 things they want the new Assembly to implement during the first 100 days of the new term.

Sinn Féin lists a Bill of Rights as one of its priorities whilst in government.

Human Rights Act

Alliance underlines the importance of the Human Rights Act in relation to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. They state they will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act.

Pledging their support for the Human Rights Act, the **SDLP** will 'resist any attempts to diminish the protections currently afforded to us' through the HRA and the European Convention of Human Rights.

Sinn Féin will work with 'all progressive forces to resist the repeal of the 1998 Human Rights Act.'

While the **Green Party** simply states it will 'Defend the Human Rights Act'

Unsurprisingly, **UKIP** say they will repeal the HRA and replace it with a British Bill of Rights. They add that they will withdraw from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights.

Rights & Equality

Freedom of Assembly

The Unionist parties and Alliance have addressed the contentious issue of parades.

TUV outline that legislation on parading must give primacy to the right to freedom of assembly when determining competing rights related to parades. They also wish to see the Parades Commission abolished.

The **UUP** also focuses on the freedom of peaceful assembly and calls for a new adjudication body to replace the Parades Commission, one which operates in a 'fully transparent and accountable manner'.

Throwing their support behind reform, the **DUP** says it is in favour of new legislation to deal with parades and protests.

UKIP simply states that it 'opposes the prevention of local legal expressions of cultural identity by the Parades Commission'.

Alliance is in favour of developing a model for parading which includes a legitimate decision-making body which has widespread support.

Abortion

Sinn Féin says they will introduce human rights compliant legislation in relation to cases of fatal foetal abnormality and sexual crime.

Included in the 10 things that should be done within the first 100 days of the new Assembly, the **Workers Party** affirm their belief in the woman's right to choose and wish to secure the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to NI.

The extension of the Abortion Act 1967 is echoed by the **Green Party**.

TUV does not believe that the unborn child should be denied his or her fundamental rights.

Marriage Equality

TUV will oppose any redefinition of marriage and defend traditional family values.

SDLP says it will bring forward legislation to extend the right to marry with full family status to same sex couples.

The **Workers Party** state that LGBT persons have the right to expect the same level of protection, support and legal safeguards as everyone else. They have included Marriage Equality as one of the 10 things the Assembly should introduce within the first 100 days of the new Assembly.

The **Green Party** also promise to bring forward legislation for equal marriage.

Sinn Féin is in favour of extending marriage equality to all.

Alliance also pledges to introduce legislation relating to same-sex marriage, but add that there are protections for 'faith groups and religious celebrants who do not wish to marry same-sex couples.'

LGB&T

The **Green Party**, **Alliance** and the **Workers Party** have committed to ending the lifetime ban on MSM giving blood. The **UUP** also call for NI to be brought into line with the rest of the UK.

The **Greens** want to update the Gender Recognition Act in order to provide transgender and non-binary people with recognition based on self-declaration.

Sinn Féin says it will continue to support equality protections for LG&B whilst working to extend protection in legislation for Transgender and Intersex individuals. It commits to developing and delivering strategies on Sexual Orientation and Gender Equality.

SDLP will press for the introduction of a Sexual Orientation Strategy and a comprehensive gender strategy.

Alliance proposes developing a Strategy for Transgender People. They also want to see the ban on gay and unmarried couples adopting and will continue to oppose the proposed Conscience Clause.

Racism

A number of parties pledge to support and implement the long overdue Racial Equality Strategy. The **SDLP**, **Workers Party**, **UUP**, **Sinn Féin**, **Alliance** and the **Green Party** all mention its implementation.

Alliance makes the commitment as part of a Single Equality Bill to bring NI in line with the UK

The **UUP** add that they will work with organisations which help BME and migrant communities engage in the political process.

Sinn Féin adds that they will also develop a Refugee Integration Strategy.

Living Wage

The **Workers Party** call for the introduction of a ‘realistic living wage of at least £8.50 per hour.’

Sinn Féin supports the public sector becoming a Living Wage employer.

Meanwhile the **Green Party** wants a properly calculated living wage as outlined by the Living Wage Foundation.

The **SDLP** will create a ‘Fair Employment Enforcement Unit’ within the department of Finance, which will ensure employees are paid a fair wage and not exploited.

Zero Hours Contracts

UKIP state they are against zero hours contracts.

Alliance wish to use powers in the Employment Act 2016 to introduce regulations on Zero-Hour Contracts (and Minimum Guaranteed Hours Contracts), including, for example, a Statutory Code of Practice and a right for a worker to request a normal contract in certain circumstances.

Homelessness

The **UUP** wishes to place a duty on statutory services such as the NHS and prisons to prevent homelessness.

Meanwhile the **Green Party** wants to tackle homelessness through the building of social housing and abolish the priority need category for homeless applicants so that every homeless person can seek help.

Alliance also promises to tackle homelessness, including a number of measure designed to help homeowners who are at risk of losing their homes.

Finally the **SDLP** want to introduce a new homelessness strategy to tackle the problem.

Discrimination

The **UUP** commits to promoting equality for young people in the provision of goods, facilities and services. They don’t specify whether this will apply to those under 16, but say they will place equality considerations at the heart of the decision making process.

Alliance says it will ensure that any new age discrimination legislation outlaws age discrimination against under-16s in Northern Ireland. It adds it will cover age discrimination in older people through its Single Equality Act.

Sinn Féin will bring introduce legislation to ensure that the provision of Goods, Facilities and Services applies protections equally on all grounds of discrimination. They have previously stated they believe that such protections should apply to everyone regardless of their age.

Disability

Sinn Féin commits to strengthen Disability legislation while bringing forward a new Disability strategy.

The **UUP** pledges to implement the Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

The **SDLP** says it will review current discrimination legislation to determine if it is delivering effective outcomes in access for those with disabilities.

Alliance will apply the 'Good relations' duty to all organisations operating in the public sector, including on the basis of sexuality, gender, disability and other criteria, covered by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

NI Government & Political Reform

Many of the parties have advocated reform of some kind at Stormont.

Opposition

Alliance, TUV, NI Conservatives, UUP, SDLP all make mention of establishing an Opposition.

Petition of Concern (PoC)

Alliance calls for reform of the Petition of Concern system, with the use of a PoC triggering a qualified majority vote.

The **SDLP** say the PoC should be restored to its original purpose and 'restricted to areas where there are clear and identifiable human rights or equality impacts.'

The **Workers Party** calls for an end to the abuse of the PoC and advocates a radical changes in the way the Assembly operates.

TUV wishes to simply ban Petitions of Concern.

NI Conservatives provide the most detail in regards to reform of the PoC. In their view, any PoC should be subject to review by an independent body as to whether it falls under the original intention of the mechanism. It will have the power to block any PoC if it believes it is abusing the intention of the PoC system.

Transparency & Political Donations

The **Greens** will seek the removal of NI's exemption into rules on the disclosure of political donations, with a view to seeing all donations over £500 being made public.

SDLP commits to introducing a Transparency Bill within the life of the next Assembly.

Alliance pledges to let the public know who donates to NI's political parties.

The **DUP** states they will make political donations open, transparent & fair as part of Stormont reform, including the banning of donations from those outside of the UK. It also pledges reform on Assembly expenses.

Other reforms

Alliance, UUP, NI Conservatives and the **Green Party** wish to see defamation laws here modernised and brought into line with the rest of the UK.

The **Workers Party** call for the reinstatement of the Civic Forum.

The **Green Party** want a requirement that 1/3 of all candidates in future Assembly elections are female, with financial penalties for those who do not enforce it. They also wish to enshrine a legal duty of cooperation to apply to all government departments in all functions.

SDLP wish to see cumulative fines for government departments and local government for delays in Freedom of Information requests.

Sinn Féin will support the introduction of gender quota legislation for the Assembly and public bodies. They also commit to legislation which will make those who do not disclose conflict of interests liable for prosecution.

Education

Article 71 Exemption

A number of parties have advocated the end to the Article 71 exemption for teaching from Fair Employment rules. The **DUP**, **TUV** and the **UUP** all wish to see an end to the exemption. The **UUP** add they will 're-examine the requirement for denominational RE certificates in the light of Human Rights obligations.'

Integrated Education

Alliance provides a nine-point plan on education, which includes a Government target of a minimum of 20% of children being educated in integrated schools and 40% in mixed schools within the next ten years.

NI Conservatives want to continue the work of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and build towards an integrated system of education.

The **Workers Party** will call for the establishment of an Independent Commission tasked with the responsibility of mapping out an Integrated Education Strategy.

The **Greens** will seek an independent review of the barriers to increasing integrated education, as well as ensuring all children have access to integrated education.

The **SDLP** says it will build and promote integrated education.

Whilst a little more vaguely, the **UUP** have said they will 'Advocate policies which will lower and remove barriers to greater mixing within and between different schools and different sectors'.

Sinn Féin wants to facilitate the growth of Irish Medium; Integrated; and Shared Education.

Student Fees

The **Green** party will oppose plans to raise undergraduate tuition fees further.

The **UUP** support a fair and sustainable model for funding for Third Level education.

SDLP pledges to reduce the portion of the tuition fee paid by students.

Alliance simply state that they believe that tuition fees can continue to be frozen in line with inflation, provided that the Executive is prepared to address the resulting funding requirements.

The **Workers Party** want a publicly funded education system free of tuition fees.

The **NI Conservatives** would increase higher education fees to £6,000 per annum.

Other

Sinn Féin want to address the effects of inequality on the learning process by skewing resources towards children in need.

Justice

UKIP says it will deport foreigners who commit crimes in the UK. It will not give prisoners the vote.

The **DUP** will support the full introduction of body camera on police officers. They will support the introduction of a central pro bono fund to provide legal assistance where legal aid is not available. They will also increase the maximum period of imprisonment for offences involving violence or neglect directed against the elderly and vulnerable.

Sinn Féin wants to ring fence funding for front-line policing. They also want to create an anti-sectarian charter.

Interestingly the **NI Conservatives** advocate the drafting of a 'statement of wrongs' on the past, which places blame for the Troubles on all groups and individuals who have acted outside of the law.

TUV want to change the definition of a victim, so it will not include paramilitaries. They also want a pension for those severely injured during the Troubles – one which excludes paramilitaries. They support the introduction of legislation to strengthen the law against the glorification of terrorism.

The **Green Party** want to see a raise in the age of criminal responsibility. The party want to update Prison Service policy to ensure transgender prisoners are housed in facilities correct for their gender, and not in solitary confinement. They also support a pension for those injured during the Troubles, but with a review panel to deal with controversial cases.

Calling for structural reform of the criminal justice and prison systems, the **SDLP** want to implement clearer timeframes for cases, and a shift in focus within prisons from security to rehabilitation.

In relation to justice, **Alliance** want to implement Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders which will protect alleged victims of domestic violence from perpetrators for a period of up to 28 days, providing immediate emergency protection for victims. They also want to develop and implement an Adult Restorative Justice Strategy.

The **UUP** want to prioritise a victim-centred approach to the Criminal Justice System and to tackle crime against older people.

Environment

Fracking

Sinn Féin, the **Workers Party**, **Greens**, and **SDLP** and all support a ban on fracking.

The **UUP** will continue to oppose applications to frack unless they have been independently supported by means of positive Environmental Impact Assessments, Health Impact Assessments. Economic Business Plans and any other process necessary to form evidence based judgment.

The **DUP** support fracking 'as long as environmental law is strictly implemented.'

Climate Change

Sinn Féin, **Alliance**, & the **Green Party** wish to bring forward Climate Change legislation for Northern Ireland. The latter two also want to establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency.

UKIP wish to repeal the Climate Change Bill.

Water

The **Green Party** want to ensure that water resources stored and routed for public consumption are kept in public ownership.

Alliance on the other hand believes that the introduction of fair water charges, which must be linked to use, is consistent with a progressive approach to revenue-raising and ensuring services are provided to the most vulnerable in society.

Renewables

The **UUP** want to review the Northern Ireland target of 40% of electricity from renewable sources by 2020, in terms of achievability and affordability.

Alliance wishes to introduce a Renewable Energy Bill to modernise the renewable energy market.

Health

Both **Alliance** and the **UUP** commit to a target of zero suicides.

Alliance wants to introduce a Mental Capacity Bill and a Mental Trauma Service.

The **Green Party** advocates retaining free prescriptions, but introducing a voluntary payment scheme for those who wish to contribute to the cost of their prescriptions.

The **NI Conservatives** believe all NICE approved medicines should be available within 3 months of NICE approval – as is the case in England and Wales.

The **TUV** and **SDLP** call for more funding for mental health services.

Sinn Féin will implement recommendations by the Older Person's Commissioner on the culture of care provision, dealing with regulation and inspection, standards of care, protecting whistle blowers and training and value of workforce.

