

change the face of politics

**THE NORTHERN IRELAND
WOMEN'S COALITION
KEY PRIORITIES 2003**



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Key Commitments

The Women's Coalition is working to change the face of politics, making it more open, more in touch and more representative of the whole community. In the next Assembly, we will continue to work for all people, by:

- Making the Agreement work for democracy and peace
- Defending the right of all people to live and work without fear and intimidation
- Working to bring unionists, nationalists and others together in a shared vision of the future
- Involving more women, young people, ethnic minorities and community representatives in politics and public life

These are our priorities for the next four years.



Politics: Playing Our Part

We are committed to working with other parties and the community to find solutions that work for everyone in Northern Ireland. We believe political institutions should be open, representative and accountable to the people they serve. In the next Assembly we will work for:

- The stability of the institutions, so that progress on urgent problems is not disrupted
- An end to the practice of politicians holding more than one elected position
- A target of 40% for women on public bodies, schemes to get more women into politics
- A Northern Ireland-wide Youth Assembly, involving young people in politics
- Changes to the system of voting in the Assembly, so all votes count equally
- Sign language recognised as an official language of the Assembly

- Completion of the Bill of Rights, making sure it is an effective safeguard of rights for all
- A Single Equality Act, updating equality laws to include age and disability

Developing a Safe Society

Everyone has the right to a sense of security and safety and a police service that works for all. We will work for:

- A police service reflecting the community, including targets for women and ethnic minorities
- More co-operation between the police service and the community
- Support and training to make DPPs effective partnerships between police and community
- Free home safety devices and advice for older people
- More funding for youth and community workers, to tackle anti-social behaviour
- The hand-gun ban in place in the rest of the UK to be extended to Northern Ireland
- More women on the Policing Board and among senior officers.
- Human Rights training for all PSNI officers
- Extension of the Police Ombudsman's powers to investigate policies as well as complaints
- Finding agreement on transferring powers for policing and justice to the Assembly

Supporting Communities

Fostering safe and cohesive communities is an essential part of building peace in our society. We must invest in improving relations at interfaces and across Northern Ireland. We will work for:

- More resources for community and women's groups delivering essential services
- A forum to bring together initiatives to tackle sectarianism and promote good relations
- A code of conduct for politicians dealing with interface situations
- A strategy for neighbourhood renewal, starting with the most disadvantaged areas
- Accessible transport, community and play facilities in all new housing developments



Photograph: Pat McGuigan

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Economic Equality

A healthy economy is key to tackling many social problems. Growth should improve our quality of life, particularly for the most disadvantaged. To achieve this, we will work for:

- Sustainable jobs bringing real benefits to the whole community
- A living minimum wage of £5 an hour, including workers under 21 years of age
- Narrowing the pay gap of 19% between average male and female earnings
- Extra support to revitalise the rural economy, including farm diversification
- Affordable, high-quality childcare, to make it easier for parents to work
- Links between businesses and higher education, developing skills and encouraging research
- Invest Northern Ireland to focus on supporting local business start-ups, developing new inner city partnerships and supporting niche markets, such as green technology
- Closer co-operation between Northern Ireland businesses and the enlarged European Union
- Extension of the Euro to the UK
- More support for developing the social economy sector

Eradicating Poverty: A More Equal Society

The top priority for government in the next four years must be improving the quality of life for the poorest in our society. We need a strong anti-poverty strategy, including:

- Benefits that are calculated in relation to the cost of living
- A comprehensive strategy for homelessness, including funding to voluntary groups
- Special strategies to tackle child poverty
- An action plan to ensure the Traveller community can access high standards of services

Improving Health

Everyone has the right to high standards of health care. This must be determined by need and never by where you live or your ability to pay.



Our priorities for health are:

- More investment in health services, including tackling waiting lists and preventing illness
- The opening of a regional woman-centred maternity hospital as soon as possible
- Free personal care for elderly people, within the next Assembly
- Extend 24 hour telephone service, NHS Direct, to Northern Ireland
- More support for teachers and peer education, to improve health education, drugs awareness and Relationship and Sexuality Education for young people
- A government strategy to tackle alcohol abuse and binge drinking
- To work towards the introduction of restrictions on smoking in public places
- A reduction in rates of unwanted pregnancies through greater provision of sexual health services, awareness campaigns and an extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to meet the needs of the 2,000 women in Northern Ireland who travel to Britain each year for abortions.
- More investment in mental health services, including 24 hour psychiatric cover in A&E
- More resources for tackling eating disorders

Paying for Government Reforms

The government must raise revenue in a fair way that does not inhibit the economy or burden those least able to pay. We will work for:

- The powers to set tax and benefit rates to be devolved to the Assembly
- An end to Private Finance Initiatives - much-needed schools, hospitals and roads should not be mortgaged for future generations

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- We reject any form of water rate that impacts on those with low incomes or large families – money raised should be ring-fenced to improve water and sewerage infrastructure
- Money raised from selling army barracks should benefit the community



Photograph: The Fermanagh Herald

Agriculture and Rural Development

The Women's Coalition believes that no one should be disadvantaged in accessing services or employment because of where they live. Diminishing farm incomes have brought devastation to many farm families, particularly smaller farms. We will work for:

- A farm retirement scheme that includes farmer and spouse
- A first steps intervention agency to support small farmers managing change
- Subsidised childcare for rural families
- Support for rural schools, shops and services, to maintain social cohesion
- Health outreach targeting rural men who may not otherwise access health services
- Reducing the burden of paperwork on the farming community
- Promoting alternative land use, including diversification and organic farming
- Support for women on farms
- Tax incentives for developing new industries and investment in rural areas
- Rural proofing to ensure equal access to services for rural communities
- More support for fishermen and their families

Safeguarding our Environment

We need to protect our environment for people and communities, not just for wild life. We will work for:

- An Environmental Protection Agency, as the only region of the UK without one
- A target of 35% of electricity from renewable sources
- Grants for individuals and developers to build eco homes, powered by renewable energy
- A marine protection strategy, including measures to protect fish stocks
- Kerb-side recycling schemes extended to every household
- A 10p tax on plastic bags, to cut down use and waste
- A voice for local people in planning: the legal right to third party appeal
- Protection from over-development of urban areas
- Protection for the rural environment, green belt and public spaces in towns

Transport and Road Safety

Investing in public transport is an investment in the wellbeing of our communities and the infrastructure of our economy. We will work for:

- More resources for public transport, to give drivers an effective alternative to the car
- Regular, fast rail service to link both airports with Belfast city centre
- Free transport extended to all school children, to cut rush hour traffic
- Safer footpaths, pedestrian crossings and cycle lanes
- Traffic calming schemes rolled out to residential areas across Northern Ireland
- A rural transport strategy
- A 50% target for cutting road deaths, with resources doubled for road safety
- A Director of Road Safety to ensure a joined up approach



Photograph: Spectator Newspapers

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- A compulsory course for those convicted of repeat driving offences
- Tougher sentences for those who kill or seriously injure through dangerous driving
- Lowering the maximum amount of alcohol permitted when driving from 80 to 50 mg



Education

Each child is entitled to a high standard of education appropriate to his or her needs. Education can also contribute to breaking down barriers and tackling prejudices in our society. We will work for:

- The replacement of the 11 plus with a fairer system of transfer
- An effective anti-bullying strategy
- Extension of after-schools clubs and activities
- More resources for integrated education, and more co-operation between schools
- An integrated teacher training college, including training in community relations
- Pre-school education available for all children
- Creation of a Northern Ireland Parents' Council to give parents a stronger voice

Higher and Adult Education

Access to higher and further education should depend on ability alone, not on parental income, but we need to guarantee more secure funding for colleges and universities. We propose:

- University education free-at-source, with the abolition of fees and a restoration of grants
- Graduates to contribute through a graduate tax, when earnings reach £25,000
- An endowment fund to encourage businesses to invest in education

- New literacy programmes to reach the 1 in 4 adults with basic literacy needs
- Increased government support for training and skills in the workplace

A More Caring Society

Government policies can make it easier for people to fulfil their caring responsibilities and to help build caring communities. We will work for:

- Recognition for unpaid caring work: raising children and caring for elderly or ill relatives
- Promotion of family-friendly practices in businesses, including flexibility, childcare and an increase in maternity and paternity pay, to give real choices to working parents
- The extension of the Disability Discrimination Act to small as well as large companies
- Special efforts to be made to ensure that all groups are able to get the services and care they are entitled to

Children and Young People

Since 1998, we've been working to establish a Children's Commissioner and we are pleased a person will shortly be recruited. We recognise that a children's strategy needs to cut across government. We will work for:

- More resources for children and young people affected by conflict in their communities
- More resources for youth services, including new facilities for young people
- Extension of SureStart and support for 'positive parenting' delivered by health visitors
- Measures to improve child protection, including a helpline for victims of abuse, north-south co-operation on vetting and closer contact between agencies to manage sex offenders
- A Children's Play Strategy to ensure more play facilities in urban and rural areas

Older Citizens

Older people should be able to play a full part in their community and have the same rights to services, care and dignity.

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To ensure this, we will work for:

- Safety and security, with more free home security devices and safety advice
- A living pension, linked to average earnings and a review of women's pension provision
- Free personal care before the end of the next Assembly
- The same access to student loans, lifelong learning and business start-up grants
- Free public transport extended to women between 60 and 64 years of age
- Free access to leisure centres at off-peak times
- An end to age discrimination

Ethnic Minorities

Northern Ireland has neglected the needs of our ethnic minority communities. We need greater efforts and resources to tackle the exclusion and racism some experience on a daily basis. We will work for:

- Proper resources for the Race Forum in OFMDFM and the development of anti-racist policies
- More use of minority languages, to ensure access to services
- Exploring different cultures and religions as part of the school curriculum



- Strong legislation on hate crimes with training to ensure effective enforcement
- Extension of laws on institutional racism to Northern Ireland
- An end to the practice of detaining asylum seekers in Maghaberry prison



Domestic Violence

There are 12 domestic violence assaults every day in Northern Ireland and a more pro-active strategy is needed to protect and support victims and break the cycle of violence. We will work for:

- Support services in every local area, including government funding for groups and helplines
- More supervised child contact centres, providing safe contact for families in domestic violence cases
- Training and guidelines for legal professionals and health service staff

Arts for All: An Inclusive Strategy

Artistic, cultural and sporting activities should be affordable, positive and open to all. We will work for:

- Extension of artist-in-residence schemes to community centres and youth clubs
- Funding for public art and regenerating public spaces
- Reduced ticket prices and free entry days at museums and galleries
- The development of a maritime museum with a major Titanic exhibition
- Funding for a wider range of sporting activities, with an emphasis on involving more people

Please contact us for copies of this document in other languages and formats.
The full manifesto is available from our website.

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