



# UNISON



## 2017 NI Assembly Election Manifesto

*UNISON is the leading trade union in the UK with over 1.3 million members, 40,000 of them in Northern Ireland. Our membership includes public service workers in health and social care; the education and higher education services; local government; youth justice; private companies providing public services; and the community and voluntary sector. 84% of our membership in Northern Ireland are women. We set out below key concerns of our members across a wide range of campaigns. We are not prepared to accept the sustained attack on public services and on the pay and conditions of our members who provide them. We are not prepared to accept poverty and inequality and demand genuine power-sharing in Government in order to address these issues. We seek endorsement from parties and candidates on these issues and will publish responses to our membership.*

### **The People voted for genuine power-sharing – deliver!**

To the shame of everyone the failure to properly power-share within an equality and rights framework has resulted in a disgraceful picture of division and inequality. Our child poverty levels are disgracefully high, one-quarter of our entire workforce is classed as the working poor, our housing and homeless crisis is growing and our health and social care system is in crisis. UNISON is urging our members to vote for candidates who will genuinely commit to working together in the interests of the people, rather than the interests of their respective political parties, otherwise our society will continue in a downward spiral.

A return to direct rule appears likely. We do not believe that a period of direct rule would be in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland and should be avoided, but not at any cost. A repeat of solutions to previous crises, such as the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements, which do not put

the rights of the people first, should not be allowed. In 1998, the people of Northern Ireland voted for peace and the promise of a fair and just society. That promise has been broken. To fulfil the wishes of the people in that referendum, we demand that the parties come together and form a proper power-sharing Government, within the framework of equality and human rights, which will improve the lives of our members, their families and their communities and which will work to address the many challenges we face.

In this election we seek clear commitments from all candidates, irrespective of party, that they will work together to produce the cross-cutting policies, strategies and outcomes set out within this manifesto that are required to improve the social and economic position of all the people in Northern Ireland and deliver on the promise of the Peace Agreements.

### **We are asking all our Assembly candidates:**

- ✓ **In a new Assembly will you and your party commit to working with all other parties to produce positive equality and rights-based outcomes for the people?**
- ✓ **What steps will you and your party take to ensure that the UK Government reverses the structural adjustment conditions attached to the Fresh Start Agreement, particularly by ensuring that it is Equality Impact Assessed?**
- ✓ **What steps will you and your party take to redress the current cuts to the 'block grant' and resist further cuts?**
- ✓ **What steps will you and your party take to seek improvements in the Barnett formula and/or protect Northern Ireland from adverse impact in any change?**
- ✓ **What additional elements of financial devolution will you and your party advocate?**

## The impact of exiting the European Union

We have been disappointed by the lack of coordinated strategy from our politicians to respond to the major challenges which will face our people due to the decision to exit the EU. We need our elected representatives to work collaboratively and collectively in order to ensure the public do not suffer. The key priorities which must be addressed by our politicians include:

- Recognising that the public in Northern Ireland voted to 'remain', the best options for Northern Ireland, in terms of its future status and relationship with the EU, must be secured. This must include continued membership of the single market and customs union;
- The status of the institutions created under the Good Friday Agreement with reference to the EU must be secured. An exit from the EU cannot be used to undermine the principles of consent or equivalence under the peace agreements;
- Ensuring that there is no erosion of worker's rights and that worker's rights are instead secured and built upon moving forwards, particularly those rights which are devolved to Northern Ireland;
- Securing the future of equality and human rights protections currently enjoyed through membership of the EU, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- Protecting the rights of people across the island of Ireland from any future border which will negatively impact on trade, study, work, family life, and the peace process. The free movement of goods, persons and services across the island must be secured;
- A right to remain for EU citizens currently residing in Northern Ireland must be secured by the Executive from the UK Government. Any rise in racism, hatred and xenophobia against black or migrant workers must be strongly opposed and the vital contribution made by migrant workers to the public services on which we all depend must be recognised;
- Ensuring public services in Northern Ireland do not bear the brunt of any economic downturn;
- Funding provided by the EU for farmers, community projects or the development of infrastructure in Northern Ireland must be guaranteed in the future.

### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ To protect the people from the negative effects of exiting the EU?
- ✓ To address the issues identified by UNISON and to support the policies put forward by ICTU 'Brexit: The Key Issues'?

## The health and well-being of the People

Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of the people. However, what was a **Number 1 Priority** in the Programme for Government was dropped in 2007. Today large sections of our population are living with the consequences, including significant health inequalities between those in the most and least economically deprived areas, such as lower life expectancy, increased suicide rates, higher infant mortality rates and higher preventable death rates. To address this situation we need a model of public health which requires not only radical reform of the health and social care system, but also a radical change in the way all Government Ministers and Departments take their share of responsibility for the health and well-being of all the people. A significant, cross-governmental approach should include:

- increased funding for health and social care;
- a commitment to a real Living Wage and the abolition of zero-hour contracts;
- taking action to reduce inequalities in educational outcomes for children and young people;
- the creation of real jobs for the long-term unemployed in areas of greatest disadvantage through support for schemes like the UNISON Health Employment Partnership;
- tackling housing inequality, including increased investment in social housing, and tackling homelessness;
- the delivery of a Bill of Rights for the people of Northern Ireland and;
- a commitment across Government to deliver investment, and all policies, strategies and plans, on the basis of promoting equality of opportunity and addressing objective need.

### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ **To restore the health and well-being of the people as the Number 1 priority in the Programme for Government?**
- ✓ **To implement a new Public Health Model on a cross-Governmental basis with clear targets and timetables to address the inequalities outlined above?**

## Radical reform of health and social care

---

Recent months have seen the beginning of a new transformation process in relation to health and social care. As the union representing the clear majority of healthcare workers, clinical and non-clinical, in health and social care, UNISON expects to play a major role in any proposed reform through the Partnership Forum recently established by the Minister. Our key priorities for reform include:

- Abolition of the internal market in health and social care, and the costly and unnecessary commissioner/provider split, to free resources;
- It's replacement with a public health model delivered on NHS founding principles within the public sector, with eradicating health inequalities as its central goal;
- An end to outsourcing health services and jobs to the private sector, which has led to inadequate and increasingly precarious provision, and poorer pay and terms and conditions for the workforce. The health and well-being of the people should not be for profit making;
- Reform which addresses serious health inequalities;
- Transparency around proposals to change services, which are developed and agreed with local communities, the workforce at all grades, and their recognised trade unions;
- Reform which is undertaken in partnership with UNISON, using the successful models we have pioneered over many years, and which recognises that trade unions are the representative voice of the workforce;
- Reform which protects the workforce.

### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ **To support UNISON's key priorities for reform of health and social care?**
- ✓ **To support increased funding for health and social care in order to allow proper, progressive reform to take place?**

## A proper social care system for the public and workforce

---

In order for any reform of health and social care to be successful and improve the health of the people, reform of adult social care is desperately needed. The work of community and homecare workers is integral to the effective delivery of primary care, preventing hospital admissions and facilitating discharge. Our older population is increasing and will require more support including significant additional resources.

However, this area of care has become victim to increasing levels of privatisation, with workers suffering from poor pay and conditions. The withdrawal of providers from the market and the closure of residential and nursing homes has left older people vulnerable. UNISON wishes to see our adult social care system be one where:

- Care is commissioned and provided in a framework which promotes equality of opportunity and protects human rights;
- Proper funding is provided to meet growing need and ensure quality of care and proper terms and conditions for the workforce;
- The trend of privatising and outsourcing the delivery of care is reversed, with services instead being provided by accountable, directly employed public health workers, to improve the care and support received by clients, their families and carers, whilst also improving the conditions of the workforce;
- The poor terms and conditions experienced by workers in the private sector are addressed, such as the failure to pay a real Living Wage,

the use of zero-hours contracts and the prevalence of anti-Trade Union attitudes;

- Best practice social care outcomes are endorsed, such as the UNISON Ethical Care Charter, and the NICE Guidance specifying a minimum of 30 minutes in a domiciliary care visit;
- Admission lists to publically owned nursing homes are re-opened;

- The future of statutory provision for adults with learning disabilities and mental health needs is secured, including day centres and short breaks provision;
- Reablement is properly funded and carried out by public health care workers;
- Best practice exists in the operation of public procurement to secure these objectives.

#### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ **To ensure that our adult social care system is properly funded to respond to growing levels of need?**
- ✓ **Is reformed to improve both the standard of care and the conditions of the workforce, in line with the vision of UNISON?**
- ✓ **To promote the training and development of the next generation of social care workers?**

## Challenging poverty

Poverty remains a hugely significant problem in Northern Ireland for UNISON members, their families and communities, particularly in an environment of low pay and benefits cuts. Welfare cuts continue with mitigation measures against them only due to run until 2020. For many years UNISON and our allies have called on the Executive to bring forward an Anti-Poverty Strategy based on objective need. There is an unmet legal duty on the Executive to adopt an Anti-Poverty Strategy, despite judicial review proceedings taken by the Committee

on the Administration of Justice (CAJ). We support the principles developed by the Anti-Poverty Network and Child Poverty Alliance and we wish to see these inform the immediate development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy by a new Executive. It must pay particular attention to dealing with welfare cuts, low pay, the provision of public services and the creation of employment.

#### What steps will you and your Party take

- ✓ **To bring forward and implement an effective Anti-Poverty Strategy, to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation on the basis of objective need, informed by the principles developed by the Anti-Poverty Network and Child Poverty Alliance?**
- ✓ **To oppose damaging austerity measures, such as cuts to the Block Grant, and benefits cuts?**
- ✓ **To recognise that 51% of working age adults living in poverty live in a household where one person is working and take steps to raise incomes accordingly?**
- ✓ **To provide adequate, accessible and affordable childcare that helps people stay in or find work, particularly women?**
- ✓ **To support the creation of real jobs for the long-term unemployed in areas of greatest disadvantage through support for schemes like the UNISON Health Employment Partnership?**

## Our education services

The education budget was cut once again in 2016/17. Cleaners, transport drivers, technicians and classroom assistants have been the hardest hit. In many cases the choice has been stark – cut hours or lose their job. Pupils, students and education workers alike have suffered.

The Education Authority has predicted the number of schools with budget deficits will increase, with a large number of schools already in deficit; further cuts to the education budget for 2017/18 were predicted by the Minister before the Assembly collapsed without a budget having been agreed by the Executive.

The Education Authority continues to make proposals which do not have the best interests of children at their core and which threaten the jobs and terms and conditions of UNISON members, such as attempts to close publically owned Outdoor Education Centres. We fear further cuts to vital services will be brought forwards in the future.



### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ **To support an education system that delivers to disadvantaged areas, is non-selective, and ensures equality of outcomes?**
- ✓ **To challenge disadvantage and support improvement by taking forward a new approach to the funding formula that not only restores recent cuts, but targets objective need and inequality of outcomes?**
- ✓ **To protect and strengthen the work of classroom, nursery and special needs staff?**
- ✓ **To protect cleaning, catering and schools based staff against the threat of privatisation?**
- ✓ **To ensure that all staff in schools are employed on fair contracts?**
- ✓ **To stop plans to curtail Special Educational Needs services for pre-school children?**
- ✓ **To ensure that future area planning processes consider workforce issues and maintain job levels?**

## Workers rights are human rights

It is no longer permissible for parties or the Assembly or the Executive to contest equality and human rights, which should form the framework for power-sharing and a new Programme for Government. There must be a strong focus on promoting and protecting worker's rights through taking the following actions:

**A real living wage and pay parity:** To lift what has become a workforce defined by low pay and poor conditions, our Government needs to urgently introduce a real Living Wage based on the recommendations of the Living Wage Foundation – currently £8.45 per hour as opposed to the UK Government figure of £7.20. The Scottish and Welsh Governments are further ahead with this work. NHS workers in Northern Ireland remain lower paid than their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales, and this must be addressed as a priority by any new Executive.

**Abolish zero-hours contracts:** Improvements in pay are easily negated by zero-hours contracts. UNISON calls on the Assembly to follow New Zealand which has taken the lead in abolishing these exploitative contracts, beginning by using the powers contained within the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to prevent abuses arising from these contracts.

**Protection for transferred workers:** There has been deep resistance from senior civil servants to sign-off on an agreement to protect new workers where jobs have been transferred from the public to the private sector. This has happened despite commitments to the trade union movement from former First and Deputy First Ministers to outlaw two-tier terms and conditions. It is time for our political leadership to remove this block on workers' rights.

**Mainstream Equality and Human Rights into procurement:** Government spends billions annually on public procurement. UNISON is seeking best practice in the operation of public procurement processes, promoting equality and protecting human rights by placing ethical procurement and the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on human rights and procurement and the guidance of the Equality Commission at the centre of this process.

Attaching the right conditions to procurement processes would improve the conditions of workers, provide jobs for the long-term unemployed and improve the standards of services provided.

**Gender pay equality:** A new Executive must build on the framework for gender pay reporting in the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. It must ensure mandatory reporting and clear action plans for compliance on equal pay legislation.



**Jobs and the long-term unemployed:** A significant business plan to build on the successful UNISON/Belfast HSC Trust Health Employment Partnership, which created real jobs in the health service for the long-term unemployed, has now been with three Government Departments for several years. UNISON is calling on a new Executive to progress this plan.

**Jobs and investment:** The recent report "A Fresh Start for Equality: The equality implications of the Stormont House Agreement on the two main communities", commissioned by the Equality

Coalition (convened by UNISON and CAJ) presents a disturbing picture of growing disadvantage building up major fair employment problems. It is not permissible for disadvantaged working class communities, Catholic and Protestant, to be left behind. We are calling for genuine, cross-party support for new initiatives based on objective need, with investment, jobs and resources deployed on this basis.

**Childcare:** Women still bear the major role of unpaid primary carer. Access to affordable and appropriate childcare provision is too long outstanding. UNISON calls on the Assembly and the Executive to develop a childcare strategy that delivers adequate, accessible and affordable childcare. We support in full the considered demands set out in the Women's Manifesto and the ongoing work of the Women's Resource and Development Agency and call on the Assembly and Executive to give real effect to them, to begin to discharge their responsibilities under the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

**Apprenticeships:** The Assembly and the Executive must ensure that the apprenticeship levy, taken from the public sector paybill, is then accessible to the public sector to develop apprenticeships for the long-term unemployed and to upskill existing staff.

#### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ To challenge in-work poverty by introducing a real Living Wage for all workers, irrespective of age, and to ensure pay parity for our NHS workers?
- ✓ To support legislation to abolish zero-hours contracts for all workers?
- ✓ To protect new workers in transferred services from lower pay and worse conditions than existing workers?
- ✓ To implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission on public procurement and human rights?
- ✓ To ensure mandatory reporting on equal pay and compliance with equal pay laws?
- ✓ To support the UNISON/Belfast HSC Trust Health Employment Partnership?
- ✓ To ensure that all Government and inward investment plans are Equality Impact Assessed on the basis of objective need?
- ✓ To deliver a comprehensive Childcare Strategy and action plan in line with the demands set out in the Women's Manifesto?
- ✓ To ensure that the apprenticeship levy can be accessed by the public sector?
- ✓ To agree action plans to implement (on a cross-party basis) Government and public sector legal obligations to promote equality across all policies, strategies and plans?

## Equality and human rights for all

For many decades campaigners for equality and human rights have demonstrated that Government commitment, when translated from rhetoric to reality, makes for more equal, just, peaceful and safer societies. It is time for the Assembly and the Executive to catch up on this growing realisation. It is time for our political representatives to fully implement the commitments in the Good Friday and St Andrew's Agreements. Failure to do so is compounding inequality for their most disadvantaged constituents and making life more difficult for all their constituents across all communities. One of the most significant decisions our Government can take to challenge growing discrimination and inequality is to reject austerity.

The equality and human rights issues listed below are not exhaustive but have been particularly highlighted by UNISON members, in addition to our core demands on public services and in particular health, social services and education.

**Bill of Rights:** A strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland remains a key undelivered commitment from the Good Friday Agreement. We call on all parties and all candidates to agree that the UK Government must implement a strong and enforceable Bill of Rights, retain the Human Rights Act 1998, and apply equality and human rights framework to its negotiations with the Assembly and Executive on the resource allocation for Northern Ireland.

**Victims, survivors and dealing with the past:** UNISON's membership encompasses victims and survivors of the conflict from all groups. The peace agreements commitment to address their issues was a key factor in their support for it. The inadequate proposals arising, in particular, from the Fresh Start Agreement do not discharge the commitments made. We support the recommendations of the CAJ and call on the Assembly and the Executive to finally deal with a matter that is fundamental to peace and reconciliation.

**Women and the conflict:** The UK Government has failed to implement 'UN Resolution 1325 on Women and Conflict', in Northern Ireland. This resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention of conflicts and in peace negotiations, peace-building, peace-keeping and post-conflict reconstruction. We call on the incoming Executive to

press the UK Government to include women in Northern Ireland in its action plans.

**Abuse inquiries:** The rights of the victims and survivors of institutional abuse must be fully protected and given a high priority by any incoming Executive. It is welcome that the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse has shone a light on the extent of the abuse suffered. The report must now be implemented in compliance with international human rights standards.

### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ **To honour the commitments made to equality and human rights in our Peace Agreements?**
- ✓ **To press the UK Government to implement a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and retain the Human Rights Act?**
- ✓ **To establish a genuine process to address the issues raised by victims and survivors and to deal with the unfinished business of the past?**
- ✓ **To press the UK Government to implement UN Resolution 1325 in Northern Ireland?**
- ✓ **To support victims and survivors of institutional abuse?**

**Weak and missing equality strategies:** UNISON has been concerned for some time at the number of either weak or missing equality strategies within Northern Ireland. Our members across each of the nine section 75 groups believe that this is not acceptable, and wish to see genuine commitments to action, particularly in relation to the development of Age Discrimination legislation and an updated Gender Equality Strategy.



**Right to choose:** UNISON supports a woman's right to choose. We fully support the 'Trust Women' campaign which is calling for legislation to be brought forwards to bring us into compliance with Article 8 ECHR and is calling on our MLAs to trust women to make decisions about their own lives, to

press for legal change to allow greater abortion access, and to push for a free vote.

**Domestic violence:** UNISON has led the way in developing workplace programmes with health employers to challenge domestic violence. The Executive has yet to match this commitment despite over 28,000 domestic violence incidents, nearly 3,000 sexual offences and over 700 offences of rape reported to police in Northern Ireland in 2014-15. We work with our allies to challenge this growing evil. We support the demands in the Women's Manifesto and call on the Executive and Assembly to bring forth action plans to implement them.

**Marriage equality:** UNISON members overwhelmingly support marriage equality and they have been at the forefront of the campaign. It is unacceptable that an issue of equality and human rights, which has now won the support of the Assembly, should be blocked by a parliamentary mechanism which was created more to protect equality than deny it.



**Housing:** The serious religious inequality in social housing in Northern Ireland has attracted the attention of both the UN and the European Commission. UNISON is supporting our allies such as PPR in calling on parties and candidates to support a time-bound, resourced strategy to tackle housing inequality. We are also calling for parties and candidates to prioritise investment in affordable social housing and to ensure that policy and service provision addresses the needs of the growing number of homeless people in our society.

**Environmental rights:** We support ICTU proposals for investment in the green economy. Unfortunately, political dysfunction has halted a range of exciting projects and in their place attention has turned to the issue of fracking and drilling. We fully support our members in Fermanagh in opposition to fracking. Drilling proposals have now extended to Belfast and County Antrim and we support the Stop the Drill Campaign and the call for the removal of Part 16 of the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (GDO) for Mineral Exploration. We call on all parties to oppose fracking and drilling proposals and to support Planning Guidance to councils which identifies the environmental evidence for the damage fracking, drilling and related technologies create; requires Councils to conduct the widest possible consultation, and; requires the full relevant consideration by Councils of such consultation outcomes for any fracking and drilling-related planning application.

#### What steps will you and your Party take:

- ✓ To ensure that comprehensive strategies (with real action plans) are developed to tackle discrimination and promote equality?
- ✓ To support a woman's right to choose and to support the 'Trust Women' campaign which is calling on our MLA's to trust women to make decisions about their own lives, to press for legal change to allow greater abortion access, and to push for a free vote on any progressive change?
- ✓ To support and implement the demands in the Women's Manifesto on domestic violence?
- ✓ To support the campaign for marriage equality?
- ✓ To support a time-bound, resourced strategy to tackle housing inequality; to support and implement policies for increased investment in affordable social housing; and to support and implement policies to tackle the homeless crisis?
- ✓ To oppose fracking and drilling proposals; and to support Planning Guidance to Councils which (i) identifies the environmental evidence for the damage fracking, drilling and related technologies create; (ii) requires Councils to conduct the widest possible consultation, and (iii) requires the full relevant consideration by Councils of such consultation outcomes for any fracking and drilling-related planning application?