



**STRONG LEADERSHIP  
A CLEAR ECONOMIC PLAN  
A BRIGHTER, MORE SECURE FUTURE  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**



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## Foreword

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This General Election for Westminster is the most important in a generation. It is a clear choice for the United Kingdom – between the competence of a Conservative long-term economic plan that is working, or a return to the chaos of Labour who wrecked our economy.

Five years ago the United Kingdom was on the brink of economic ruin. Labour's chaos and incompetence had left us with the largest budget deficit in our peacetime history and the biggest of any major economy. We had been plunged into the longest and deepest recession since the war. Unemployment had risen by half a million across the United Kingdom.

Today, after five years of Conservative-led Government, the United Kingdom is standing tall once again. We have halved the budget deficit. Inflation is at record lows. Interest rates have been kept low. Unemployment is falling right across the country, and we have created more jobs than the rest of Europe put together. The United Kingdom is now one of the fastest growing major economies in the world.

None of this has been easy. It has involved difficult choices for the Government. More important, it has required the sacrifice and determination of the people of the United Kingdom as a whole, including here in Northern Ireland. Conservatives recognise that in rescuing our country from Labour's chaos, times have been tough for very many people.

That is why we have tried to help hardworking people with the cost of living wherever possible. For example, in Northern Ireland we will have lifted over 100,000 people out of paying income tax altogether by 2017-18. Fuel duty has been frozen. We are helping savers and first time buyers. Pensioners have seen record increases in the state pension.

Against the odds, and against the predictions of our opponents, our long-term plan is delivering a stronger, more secure future for the United Kingdom. The disaster now would be to change course by returning to the failed Labour policies that helped to create the economic mess in the first place.

Northern Ireland can play a key role in ensuring that the United Kingdom stays on the path away from austerity and towards greater prosperity. It can do this by returning Conservatives from Northern Ireland to help secure a majority Conservative government in Westminster.

At this election, the Conservatives are the only national party that is sufficiently committed to Northern Ireland to put up candidates here. We are the only major party that offers Northern Ireland the opportunity to participate fully in the politics of the United Kingdom.

The following statement of Conservative values and policies sets out our record over the past five years and how a majority Conservative government will approach the key issues facing Northern Ireland during the next Parliament.

Under devolution all of the key public services, such as health and education, are no longer the responsibility of Westminster. They are run by the Stormont Assembly. Stormont elections will take place in May 2016. So this statement does not seek to set out detailed policies in each of the devolved areas. Instead it focuses on those areas in Northern Ireland for which the United Kingdom Government retains responsibilities. Our United Kingdom manifesto sets out those policies, such as taxation, defence, foreign policy and Europe, that will apply to the country as a whole.

Every vote for the Conservatives at this election is a vote to keep the whole of the United Kingdom on the right track. It is a vote to put Northern Ireland at the heart of United Kingdom politics with me as Prime Minister fully committed to Northern Ireland and to keeping our country together as one United Kingdom.





## Believing in Northern Ireland

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Conservatives believe in Northern Ireland. We are fully committed to building a Northern Ireland where politics works, the economy grows and where society is stronger and more united. We want to see a peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland where everybody can get on to the best of their ability – irrespective of their community background. Conservatives totally reject sectarianism and those who wish to promote discord and disunity in our society. Our aspiration is to build one, united Northern Ireland in which everybody has a stake in the future. Conservatives want a Northern Ireland which everyone who lives here is proud to call home.

To do this, a Conservative Government will continue to work alongside the Stormont Executive to help improve the effectiveness and delivery of the devolved institutions, rebalance the economy and support initiatives designed to build better community relations and a genuinely shared future.

### The Union

Conservatives believe that the best framework for achieving these objectives is for Northern Ireland to remain a full and integral part of our United Kingdom. We will never be neutral in expressing our support for the Union. In our view, all four constituent parts of the United Kingdom remain significantly better together. We are proud of what our United Kingdom has achieved over centuries, and the role that Northern Ireland has played in that, both in times of peace and war.

Our belief in the United Kingdom, though, does not just rest on history and sentiment. Conservatives are confident and optimistic about what we can achieve together in the future. Northern Ireland benefits immensely from being part of one of the world's largest economies. We gain considerably from being part of a United Kingdom that continues to punch above its weight and be a force for good on the world stage. In our view the Union also enables each of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom to retain our distinctive identities, while coming together as one nation. Northern Ireland is stronger within a strong United Kingdom.

Yet we also recognise that many in Northern Ireland aspire to a united Ireland. That is entirely legitimate and the Belfast Agreement enables people in Northern Ireland to define themselves as British, Irish, or both. Conservatives will always govern fairly, justly and in the interests of the whole community, whatever people's constitutional preferences or political allegiances. We support people's rights to express their culture and identity lawfully and in ways that also respect the rights of others.

The Belfast Agreement, though, also makes clear that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland will only ever be determined by the consent of the people who live here. Conservatives stand fully by the principle of consent. We will always uphold the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland.

In our view all tests of opinion show that in Northern Ireland today a substantial majority continues to support the Union. We therefore feel that the circumstances requiring a border poll are not currently satisfied and that such an exercise would be costly, divisive and a distraction.

### Relations with the Republic of Ireland

Conservatives warmly welcome the transformation that has taken place in relations with the Republic of Ireland in recent years, both locally and at a national level. This has been best symbolised by the historic visit to the Republic by Her Majesty The Queen in May 2011, followed by the return visit to the United Kingdom by President Higgins in April 2014. Relations between our two countries have never been stronger – politically, economically, socially and culturally.

In 2012 the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach initiated an annual UK-Irish Summit to take forward co-operation across a range of different areas. Conservatives will continue to support practical common sense co-operation through the institutions established by the Belfast Agreement and more broadly between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

A Conservative Government will continue to work closely with the Irish Government on the “decade of centenaries”. Our objective is to ensure that sensitive anniversaries over the coming years are marked in ways

that are historically accurate and are used to promote reconciliation and a greater understanding of our shared history.

## Making politics work – the Stormont House Agreement

Conservatives believe strongly in devolution and the political institutions established by the 1998 Belfast Agreement and its successors. We want to see politics here work and deliver for everyone in Northern Ireland. Conservatives reject calls for a return to direct rule from Westminster. It is our view that local policies and services should be determined by locally elected politicians through locally accountable institutions. We have honoured our commitment to ban double jobbing between Westminster and Stormont.

By last autumn, however, it had become clear that the institutions were not working as well as they could. This was due in part to a continuing inability to make progress on issues such as flags, parading and the past which were damaging political relations within the Northern Ireland Executive and fuelling community division.

In addition, the Executive faced an impending budget crisis which, left unresolved, would have led to increasing chaos at Stormont. This could have jeopardised the ability of the devolved institutions to function effectively, calling into question the sustainability of devolution.

The Conservative Secretary of State therefore made the realistic assessment that a fresh round of cross-party talks was necessary in order to find a way forward. These talks began in October 2014 and culminated on 23 December 2014 with the Stormont House Agreement.

As a signatory to the Belfast Agreement, the Irish Government participated fully in matters falling within their responsibility. Yet at all times the negotiations were conducted in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach to Northern Ireland affairs. This provides that Northern Ireland’s internal arrangements are for the parties here and the United Kingdom Government alone to decide. A Conservative Government will always stand by that principle.

The Stormont House Agreement dealt with some of the most difficult issues that Northern Ireland faces, including:

- Putting the finances of the Northern Ireland Executive back on a sustainable footing – including agreement on a budget for 2015-16, public sector reform, and welfare reform. This is boosted by a package of support from the Government amounting to around £2 billion of extra spending power.
- A Commission on Flags, Identity and Culture is to be established by June.
- Based on the party leader discussions that took place last summer, proposals are set out by the UK Government which open the way for a devolved system of adjudicating parades.
- Broad-ranging new structures will be established to address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past. Conservatives have always insisted that we will never be a party to a subverting or re-writing of Northern Ireland’s past. The new institutions will therefore have the obligations to be fair, balanced, proportionate and accountable written into them.
- The Agreement includes measures to improve the way the devolved institutions work, including a reduction in the number of government departments and measures to facilitate the establishment of an official opposition – something for which Conservatives have long argued.

The Stormont House Agreement also paved the way for the UK Government to introduce legislation that will enable the Northern Ireland Executive to vary the rate of Corporation Tax. Legislation completed its passage through Parliament in March. The Act contains a commencement clause that is subject to the conditions in the Stormont House Agreement

that commits the Executive to keeping its finances on a sustainable footing.

Conservatives believe that the Stormont House Agreement represented a significant step forward for Northern Ireland, in particular to put politics back on a stable footing. The Agreement can play a major role too in our efforts to strengthen the economy and build a stronger society. But to do that it must be implemented faithfully and in full.

## A growing economy

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Just like the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland suffered heavily as a result of Labour's great recession. In fact the recession lasted longer and was deeper than in any other part of the United Kingdom with economic activity shrinking by nearly 14 per cent and unemployment rising. Furthermore, the last Labour Government made no serious attempt to deal with the Northern Ireland economy's over-reliance on public expenditure.

Five years on and Northern Ireland is sharing in the economic recovery across the United Kingdom due to our long-term economic plan. Growth this year in Northern Ireland is forecast at around 2 per cent – which compares favourably with other major economies. Unemployment is down from 7.1 per cent in May 2010 to 6 per cent today with the claimant count falling for each of the past 26 months. The number of people in work is up by 32,000 since the last election. The private sector is leading the way with an increase in the number of private sector jobs of nearly 21,000 – with more than 12,000 created in the past year.

Northern Ireland continues to attract significant foreign direct investment. In fact with over 800 foreign investors employing over 75,000 people Northern Ireland is one of the top destinations in the United Kingdom for inward investment. Companies such as Allen & Overy, Seagate Technology, Bombardier Aerospace, Citi and the Allstate Corporation are attracted to Northern Ireland for a number of reasons, for example:

- A highly educated and talented workforce.
- Labour costs around 15 per cent lower than the UK average.

There are no side deals. The Agreement is a package – if one part falls then all of it unravels. Conservatives will, therefore, continue to work with all parties and with the Irish Government to ensure that everybody fulfils their obligations under the Stormont House Agreement. A Conservative Government will bring forward a Bill in the new Parliament to deal with those parts of the Agreement for which we have responsibility and which require legislation.

- High-quality infrastructure, including strong air links to Heathrow.
- The first part of Europe to achieve 100 per cent broadband coverage and a 40-gigabyte per second transatlantic and terrestrial telecommunications link between Northern Ireland, North America and Europe.
- Two world class universities – Queen's, Belfast and the University of Ulster.
- A quality of life that twice in recent years has led Northern Ireland to be voted the happiest place in the United Kingdom in which to live.

Many of Northern Ireland's locally grown companies are thriving too, such as global diagnostics firm Randox which recently announced plans to create 540 high quality jobs over 4 years. 30 per cent of the world's aircraft seats are manufactured in Northern Ireland. We are developing considerable expertise in the renewables and energy sectors. The iconic new London routemaster bus is built by Wrightbus in Ballymena, an example of where the Government's commitment to improving public transport in the capital is providing benefits in many different parts of the UK.

Yet many significant challenges remain. Economic recovery still lags behind other parts of the United Kingdom. The economy is still far too heavily dependent on public spending, which according to some independent surveys accounts for around three quarters of GDP. Productivity and average earnings are lower



than the UK average, while rates of economic inactivity are higher. Youth unemployment, while showing a welcome fall over the past year, is still too high.

Under devolution, most of the responsibilities for local economic development rest with the Stormont Assembly. Yet Northern Ireland has benefited from Conservative economic policies for the United Kingdom as a whole. For example, our success in halving the deficit has helped to keep interest rates low. Corporation Tax has been cut from 28 to 20 per cent – the joint lowest in the G20. The National Insurance Employment Allowance is worth up to £2,000 and will benefit 23,000 businesses. We have abolished Employer National Insurance altogether on those aged under-21, making it cheaper to employ young people, and will abolish Employer National Insurance Contributions for apprentices aged under-25.

In addition, Northern Ireland has benefited from the Government's measures to support the film and television sector. This has helped to ensure that one of the world's most successful television programmes, Game of Thrones, continues to be filmed in Northern Ireland, contributing in excess of £20 million to the local economy.

## The G8 Summit and the Economic Pact

In June 2013, the Prime Minister brought the G8 Summit to Co Fermanagh to showcase Northern Ireland to the world as a place to visit, do business and to invest. On the eve of the Summit the Government signed an Economic Pact with the Executive designed to give a further boost to the private sector and rebalance the economy, and to assist measures to build a more united community.

The Economic Pact has resulted in the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive working more closely than ever before and included:

- Additional borrowing powers of £100 million for the Executive to invest in schemes to develop shared education and housing.

- The establishment of a Joint Ministerial Task Force on Banking and Access to Finance which has resulted in much greater transparency on bank lending in Northern Ireland.
- Bank lending to SME businesses was 8 per cent higher at the end of 2014 than in the last quarter of 2013. Programmes now managed by the British Business Bank have facilitated more than £40 million of lending to businesses – and the rate of lending is increasing.
- Following the G8 Summit and Investment Conference attended by the Prime Minister Invest NI announced record results for 2013-14 and in the first six months of 2014-15 promoted over 10,800 jobs.
- Green Investment Bank investments of £1.5 million and £1.7 million will contribute to two projects valued at £3 million and £3.5 million respectively aimed at increasing the efficiency of the local agri-food sector.
- Continuance of Northern Ireland's 100 per cent Assisted Area status, a crucial tool for attracting inward investment and jobs without the normal constraints that come with EU state aid rules.
- A commitment to take a decision in principle on the devolution of Corporation Tax by the Autumn Statement 2014.
- A joint British-Irish Visa Scheme for tourists from China and India. This was launched in China in October 2014 and in India in February 2015.

A Conservative Government will continue to work alongside the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that the outstanding commitments made in the Economic Pact are fully delivered on both sides. In addition in 2011 Conservatives secured the devolution of long haul air passenger duty to support Northern Ireland's direct air link to the United States.

Following the success of the events like the World Police and Fire Games in 2013 and the Giro d'Italia in 2014 we will work with the Executive to bring more international events to Northern Ireland. We will also work with the UK's extensive network of Embassies and



High Commissions to promote Northern Ireland across the globe and to help attract even more foreign direct investment

## Block Grant

Conservatives have also recognised Northern Ireland's special circumstances by continuing to provide generous assistance through the block grant from the Treasury totalling more than £11 billion in 2015-16. The spending reductions faced by the Northern Ireland Executive since the last election have amounted to around 1 per cent a year in real terms, significantly less than most Whitehall departments as part of our efforts to reduce the deficit. Public spending per head remains some 23 per cent higher than the UK average and 26 per cent higher than in England.

## Supporting hardworking people

We have also helped hardworking people with the cost of living. As a result of our increases in personal tax allowances since 2010, we will have lifted 103,000 people out of tax altogether by 2017-18 and delivered an average real terms gain of £561 for 698,000 people. Our decision to freeze fuel duty has benefited drivers of Northern Ireland's 880,000 cars, and businesses with transport costs. There are 27,000 first time buyers in Northern Ireland under this Government. The new Help to Buy ISA could help over 30,000 people purchase their first home in the next five years. The announcement in the 2015 Budget to provide basic rate taxpayers with a £1,000 Personal Savings Allowance and higher rate taxpayers with a £500 Allowance could remove up to 410,000 people from tax liability on their savings.

At the last election we committed ourselves to finding a fair and just resolution of the crisis caused by the collapse of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. This had left around 10,000 people, many elderly and vulnerable, unable to access their money. They were simply abandoned by the last Labour Government. Conservatives delivered on our pledge and through a package agreed by the Treasury with the Northern

Ireland Executive in 2011, ensured that depositors with savings of up to £20,000 received all of their money, while those with higher savings received most of their money.

As part of the United Kingdom, however, Conservatives do not believe that Northern Ireland can be immune from the economic realities facing the rest of the country, or indeed much of the rest of the developed world. That is why the Stormont House Agreement includes provisions for a significant programme of public sector reform over the coming years as part of continuing efforts to deliver services in a more effective and affordable way.

The Stormont House Agreement also committed the Executive to completing the passing of welfare reform legislation in the Assembly. In our view the current welfare system is broken. It is expensive and it fails too many people by trapping them in a cycle of dependency and poverty. Conservatives believe that the welfare system should help people off benefits and out of poverty by ensuring that work always pays, continue to support those in need and be fair to the taxpayer who foots the bill. So Conservatives strongly support welfare reforms including further reducing the benefits' cap to £23,000, the equivalent of a salary of over £29,000 before tax. A Conservative Government will ensure that nobody can claim more in benefits than the average family earns by going out to work.

We also fully back the other reform elements of the Stormont House Agreement. These include reductions in the size of the civil service. We support measures to maximise asset sales to increase the revenue available to the Northern Ireland Executive. Effective planning reform is also vital if we are to maximise the opportunities provided by the potential devolution of Corporation Tax.

## Devolving Corporation Tax to Boost the Private Sector

In 2010 Conservatives pledged to examine the potential for devolving Corporation Tax powers to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. We did this for two principal reasons. First, there is the fact that Northern



Ireland shares a land border with the Republic of Ireland which continues to have a significantly lower rate of Corporation Tax, even though Conservative cuts to the national rate have narrowed the differential. Second, the legacy of the troubles has left Northern Ireland with a smaller private sector than elsewhere. These factors make the case for devolving Corporation Tax powers unique within the United Kingdom. This is a reform that has been championed by Northern Ireland Conservatives.

As a result of the Stormont House Agreement legislation to devolve Corporation Tax powers completed its passage through Parliament in March and the Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Act is now law. The actual transfer of powers will be dependent on the Executive continuing to maintain its finances on a sustainable footing. Because of the land border shared with a low Corporation Tax jurisdiction, Conservatives believe that Corporation Tax devolution, more than any other single policy, has the potential to transform the Northern Ireland economy by attracting inward investment, boosting jobs and spreading prosperity across the community.

We are proud of the fact that it is Conservatives who are delivering such a momentous change for Northern Ireland. A Conservative Government will continue to work alongside the Executive to ensure that they maintain their financial commitments under the Stormont House Agreement. This should enable the final transfer of Corporation Tax powers to be completed in the new Parliament.

Conservatives are committed to building a strong, dynamic, private sector-led economy fit to compete in the 21st century global race for jobs and investment. Through the implementation of our long-term economic plan, along with measures such as devolution of Corporation Tax, the next Conservative government will take significant further steps towards that goal.

## Farming and Fishing

Northern Ireland's farmers and fishing communities play a vital role in our community. Our farm produce has a well-deserved and world-wide reputation for quality, robust traceability and rigorous production

standards. We believe that there are huge opportunities to sell our food and drink abroad. Through the Joint Statement signed by the UK and Irish Governments in 2012, we reaffirmed the commitment to work together to promote our respective agri-food industries around the world. This has added to the strength of the industry in Northern Ireland making it one of the region's biggest manufacturers and leading exporters. Conservatives in government secured a deal that protects Common Agricultural Policy funding for Northern Ireland. We remain totally committed to further CAP reform.

Conservatives fought hard for wholesale reform of the Common Fisheries Policy – and won. Today, the micro-management from Brussels is being reversed. The appalling practice of edible fish being thrown back into the sea to meet a bureaucratic requirement is being abolished. We now have a legally binding commitment to fish at sustainable levels.

## Public Services

Conservatives believe in strong, well run and accountable public services that serve local communities. Under devolution, all of the main public services in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Executive and Assembly – not the UK Government or the Westminster Parliament. Voters in Northern Ireland will have the opportunity to pass judgement on the record of the current Executive at the Assembly elections in May 2016 when we shall set out further ideas on public services.

Our number one priority for the public services will always be our National Health Service. The NHS is there for us throughout our lives – from the day we are born, to our final days. It is a profound expression of our values as a nation. Conservatives believe that the NHS in Northern Ireland should be valued, protected and improved.

The NHS in Northern Ireland has benefited from additional resources through the block grant as a result of the decision by Conservatives to increase spending on health in England, and this will continue in the new Parliament. Supported by a strong economy, the NHS will stay free for everyone in Northern Ireland to use,



although we think that the devolved Executive should give serious consideration to whether certain prescription charges should be reintroduced.

We also want to see our health and social care system work more effectively so that people in Northern Ireland receive the safest and most compassionate care in world.

Northern Ireland continues to produce some of the best exam results in the United Kingdom. Decisions on education are a devolved matter and Conservatives will continue to defend academic rigour and excellence in Northern Ireland's schools.

The Executive needs to address urgently significant educational under-achievement. We continue to support shared and integrated education where parents want to exercise that choice. Both the 2013 Economic Pact and the Stormont House Agreement contain extra resources for shared and integrated education.

Good transport links are vital for Northern Ireland's economy. We would encourage competition to Translink and examine the greater use of the private sector for

some of the work it now carries out 'in-house'. Improving Northern Ireland's road and rail links should be a priority for the Executive. We believe it is essential to address defects in the planning system which can block progress on important infrastructure projects for no good reason. Serious consideration should be given to privatising or reforming the Port of Belfast to generate significant new resources. Conservatives will continue to stress the importance of good and frequent transport links between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, including between Belfast and Heathrow.

Unlike many of our opponents, Conservatives understand that it is only by creating a strong economy, nationally and locally in Northern Ireland, that we can afford to pay for strong public services like hospitals and schools. It is essential, therefore, that we continue with our long-term economic plan if we are to continue generating the wealth necessary to fund public services. That requires a Conservative Government for the whole of the United Kingdom.

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## A stronger society

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Conservatives believe in a Northern Ireland for everyone, regardless of their community background. We want to see a stronger, more united and shared society. Yet today's Northern Ireland still remains far too divided – especially in areas like housing and education. These divisions have a political cost, in that they can help fuel community tensions that damage political relationships within the devolved institutions. They have a clear economic cost, deterring investment and causing the duplication of public services. They also have a security cost, in that it is in areas where these community divisions are at their most stark where the paramilitaries often prey and seek recruits.

Responsibility for the policies to deal with community relations rests firmly with the Northern Ireland Executive rather than the UK Government, but we have consistently advocated progress on this issue. We welcomed the publication in May 2013 of the Executive's community relations strategy 'Together, Building a United Community' and many of the initiatives contained within it, including

the aim of dismantling interface barriers – so-called 'peace walls' – within ten years.

Yet while Westminster is not in the lead in this area, the UK Government can play a valuable supportive role. For example, a number of the elements of the Economic Pact were designed specifically to support a shared society, such as the extra borrowing powers for shared education and housing projects. In addition, up to £500 million of the £2 billion extra spending power in the Stormont House is capital funding for shared and integrated education projects.

Conservatives believe that implementing measures to build a stronger society must be an urgent priority and a Conservative Government will continue to work with the Executive to take this forward. As the Prime Minister has said, what Northern Ireland needs is a shared future not a shared out future.

# A more secure Northern Ireland

## Upholding the rule of law

During the so-called ‘Troubles’ from 1968-1998 more than 3,700 people were killed – over 470 in 1972 – and many more were maimed and injured. Countering the threat from terrorism required huge sacrifice from the men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and our Armed Forces, over 1,000 of whom lost their lives. Operation Banner remains the longest single continuous military operation in British history.

Conservatives will always salute the remarkable dedication and courage of the RUC and our Armed Forces in defending the rule of law and in ensuring that Northern Ireland’s future would only ever be determined by democracy and consent. We will never forget the debt that we owe them. Without their work the peace process would never have happened. Conservatives will also never accept ‘equivalence’ between the security forces and those who carried out acts of terrorism. We believe that politically motivated violence – republican or loyalist – was never justified and we will not be party to a re-write of history that in any way legitimises it.

We believe in the rule of law. It is for that reason the Conservative Party opposed the Labour Government’s proposed legislation in 2005-6 that would have given an effective amnesty for the so-called ‘on-the-runs’. Had the administrative scheme to deal with ‘on-the-runs’ that we inherited ever amounted to an amnesty, immunity or exemption from prosecution we would have stopped it immediately. As the Conservative Secretary of State has made clear in Parliament, that scheme is now at an end. Those who received a letter as part of it should not rely on it. The position is clear – if the evidence exists they will face prosecution in the normal way.

The Stormont House Agreement establishes balanced, transparent, accountable and proportionate structures for dealing with legacy issues and they should be implemented fully and faithfully – with commitments on all sides to make them work. A Conservative Government will bring forward legislation for those parts of the Agreement for which the United Kingdom has responsibility, including the new Historical

Investigations Unit. Along with the Irish Government we will establish the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval. In accordance with the Agreement we will work to reform the system of legacy inquests in a way that enables the UK Government to fulfil its international obligations. We continue to believe that costly and open ended public inquiries are not the right way to deal with the legacy of the past.

## Human Rights

Conservatives are committed to repealing the current Human Rights Act and replacing it with a United Kingdom Bill of Rights. This will break the formal link between UK courts and the European Court of Human Rights, and make our Supreme Court the ultimate arbiter of human rights matters in the United Kingdom. Our Bill will remain faithful to the basic principles of human rights, which we signed up to in the original European Convention. It will protect basic rights, like the right to a fair trial, and the right to life, which are an essential part of a modern democratic society. But it will reverse the mission creep that has meant human rights law being used for more and more purposes, and often with little regard for the rights of wider society. We believe that any supplementary rights for Northern Ireland should be considered in this context.

## Policing and Justice

As a result of the changes that have taken place in Northern Ireland over the past two decades – beginning with the historic Downing Street Declaration made by John Major and Albert Reynolds in 1993 – the security situation has been transformed. Terrorism, or the threat of terrorism, no longer impacts on people’s daily lives in a way that it once did.

This has led to significant reforms of policing. The RUC has evolved into the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It enjoys widespread support across the whole community and is substantially more representative of it. The proportion of Catholics in the PSNI reached 30 per cent in 2011 – up from just over 8 per cent

when the PSNI came into being in November 2001 – enabling Conservatives in government to end the 50:50 recruitment provisions. The PSNI is also subject to rigorous accountability and oversight including the Policing Board and the Police Ombudsman.

In April 2010, with Conservative support, policing and justice powers were devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, with the UK Government retaining responsibility for national security. Northern Ireland remains one of the safest places in the United Kingdom in which to live.

## Tackling the Terrorist Threat

Yet for all the progress that has been made, there remains a small minority of dissident republicans who reject the democratic wishes of people in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and who continue to pursue their objectives by violence. They retain both the lethal intent, and the capability, to commit terrorist attacks, particularly targeted at members of the police and the prison service. This was confirmed once again by the brutal murders of Police Constable Ronan Kerr in 2011 and Prison Officer David Black in 2012.

In fact, in 2010 this Government took office against a backdrop of a deteriorating security situation in Northern Ireland. A spike upwards in terrorism had begun in 2008, and included the murders of Sappers Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey, and then Constable Steven Carroll in March 2009. This resulted in the threat level from dissident republicans being raised to Severe – where it remains today.

Conservatives believe that there can be no greater responsibility than the safety and security of the people of Northern Ireland and of the whole of the United Kingdom. One of the Prime Minister's first acts in office was to establish a National Security Council under his chairmanship. The National Security Strategy published in October 2010 made tackling Northern Ireland Related Terrorism a Tier One priority – that is the highest priority for the Government.

We have provided the Chief Constable of the PSNI with an additional £200 million over the four year Spending Review period, with a further £31 million

for 2015-16. This is significant extra funding at a time of unprecedented pressures on the public finances and when the United Kingdom also faces a very significant threat from international terrorism. The Stormont House Agreement financial package also included an undertaking by the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that police funding is protected from significant reductions. This will further help to ensure that the PSNI remains able to tackle the terrorist threat effectively.

A Conservative Government will always give the fullest possible backing to the men and women of the PSNI who do such a superb job. Working with the Security Service, and An Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland they have achieved significant successes in disrupting terrorist groups and preventing the deadly outcomes that they seek to achieve.

As a result of their efforts, and the strategic approach to tackling the threat from Northern Ireland Related Terrorism pursued by this Government, the increase in terrorist activity that emerged in 2008 has been stemmed. There were 22 national security related attacks in 2014 compared with 40 in 2010. Yet the need for total vigilance in the face of the continuing threat remains. Under a Conservative Government there will be no let-up in our efforts to ensure that terrorism never succeeds.

Both dissident republicans and individuals associated with loyalist paramilitary organisations remain involved in serious criminality. Their activities include brutal punishment attacks, drug dealing and intimidation. We are clear that these actions have no place in a civilised society and we will never tolerate them. We fully back the action being taken by the Chief Constable to investigate criminality and tackle it with the full rigour of the law. The criminal thugs who prey on the communities in which they live should expect to be investigated, charged and prosecuted, and if convicted, expect to go to prison.

## National Crime Agency

We strongly welcome the recent decision by the Northern Ireland Assembly to vote to extend the full range of powers of the National Crime Agency to Northern Ireland. As a result, the work of the NCA will now be widened to cover all crimes – including devolved offences. The ability of the NCA to recover criminal



assets and disrupt serious and organised criminals will be significantly improved. People in Northern Ireland will have the same protections as our fellow citizens in other parts of the United Kingdom.

All of the NCA's activities in Northern Ireland will be fully compatible with the devolution settlement. NCA officers will only be able to exercise police powers with

the agreement of the Chief Constable. The Northern Ireland Policing Board will oversee the work of the NCA in Northern Ireland and the Police Ombudsman will have responsibility for investigating complaints about NCA officers.





