

FORWARD, TOGETHER

Our Plan for a
Stronger Northern
Ireland, a Stronger
United Kingdom and
a Prosperous Future

THE CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST PARTY
NORTHERN IRELAND MANIFESTO 2017



The next five years are the most challenging that the United Kingdom has faced in my lifetime.

Brexit will define us: our place in the world, our economic security and our future prosperity.

So now more than ever, the United Kingdom needs a strong and stable government to get the best Brexit deal for our country and its people.

Now more than ever, the United Kingdom needs strong and stable leadership to make the most of the opportunities Brexit brings for hardworking families.

Now more than ever, the United Kingdom needs a clear plan.

This manifesto, Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Northern Ireland, a Stronger United Kingdom and a Prosperous Future will meet the great challenges of our time, beyond Brexit.

With this plan and with a strong hand through Brexit, we will build a stronger, fairer, more prosperous United Kingdom, for all of us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. May', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Theresa May
Prime Minister

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FOREWORD

by Theresa May

This election is the most important this country has faced in my lifetime. Our future prosperity, our place in the world, our standard of living, and the opportunities we want for our children – and our children’s children – all depend on getting the next five years right. If we fail, the consequences for the United Kingdom and for the economic security of ordinary, working people across this country will be significant. If we succeed, the opportunities ahead of us are great.

Now more than ever, the United Kingdom needs strong and stable government to get the best deal for our country. Now more than ever, the United Kingdom needs strong and stable leadership to make the most of the opportunities Brexit brings.

I believe our United Kingdom can emerge from this period of great national change stronger and more prosperous than ever before. I believe we can be a country that stands tall in the world and provides leadership on some of the greatest challenges of our time. I believe we can – and must – take this opportunity to build a Great Meritocracy here in the United Kingdom.

The policies set out in the following pages will begin to build that stronger, fairer, more prosperous United Kingdom. They do not offer a quick fix. People are rightly sceptical of politicians who claim to have easy answers to deeply complex problems. It is the responsibility of leaders to be straight with people about the challenges ahead and the hard work required to overcome them.

So this manifesto sets out a vision for the United Kingdom’s future – not just for the next five years, but beyond. It identifies the challenges we face and what we will do to address them. In doing so, it offers a vision of the kind of country I want the United Kingdom to be.

A United Kingdom in which every area is able to prosper, with a modern industrial strategy to spread opportunity across the whole United Kingdom. A United Kingdom in which work pays, with a higher national living wage and proper rights and protections at work. A United Kingdom in which the economy is strong to support world-class public services, with the most ambitious programme of investment in people, technology and buildings the NHS has ever seen; record – and fair – funding for schools; and the first ever proper plan to pay for – and provide – social care. And a United Kingdom in which burning injustices are tackled and overcome, with the first new Mental Health Bill for

thirty years to put parity of esteem at the heart of treatment and end the stigma of mental illness once and for all.

This is my plan for a stronger United Kingdom and a prosperous future. It is a declaration of intent: a commitment to get to grips with the great challenges of our time and to take the big, difficult decisions that are right for the United Kingdom in the long term.

None of this will be easy. It will require discipline and focus, effort and hard work. It will require leadership from a government that is strong enough to stand up for the United Kingdom, and stable enough to steer the country safely through the negotiations ahead.

Above all, it will require a unity of purpose stretching across this precious union of nations, from north to south and east to west. For as we embark on the momentous journey ahead of us over the next few years, our shared values, interests and ambitions can – and must – bring us together as a united country.

We can choose to say the task ahead is too great, to turn our face to the past and believe it cannot be done; or we can look forward with optimism, believing the best days for the United Kingdom lie ahead.

I choose to look forward: confident that we have the vision, the plan and the will to use this moment to build a better United Kingdom. A stronger United Kingdom where everyone has the economic security they need and the chance to live a secure and happy life. A fairer United Kingdom that works for everyone, not just a privileged few.



Theresa May
Prime Minister

FOREWORD

by James Brokenshire
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Conservatives are committed to building a modern, dynamic outward looking Northern Ireland that works for everyone, irrespective of their community background or political aspirations. We believe in one Northern Ireland where politics works, the economy grows and society is stronger and more united. In doing so we totally reject those who would seek to drag us back to the past, those who promote sectarianism or who want to tear society apart. Where others seek to divide, Conservatives will always seek to unite by providing strong and stable leadership in the national interest.

This manifesto sets out the priorities of a Conservative government for those areas of policy for which the UK government is primarily responsible in Northern Ireland. It does not deal in depth with those matters that are devolved to the Assembly at Stormont and which are intended to be dealt with by the Northern Ireland Executive. Other issues, such as defence and foreign affairs, are set out in our main, UK manifesto, which should be read alongside this document.

Our first priority will be to re-establish strong and stable, inclusive devolved government at Stormont. Devolved government, with local services in local hands, is what most people in Northern Ireland want, what they voted for earlier this year and what they should expect. As a party which believes strongly in devolution, a Conservative government will work intensively towards that end while being prepared to do all that is necessary to provide Northern Ireland with the good governance and political stability it requires.

Northern Ireland has made huge strides forward in recent years and come so far. A Conservative government will continue our work to strengthen the Northern Ireland economy with unemployment now down to levels not seen since before Labour's Great Recession. We want to work with all parts of the community to unlock even more of the huge potential that Northern Ireland has to offer to the rest of the United Kingdom, Europe and the wider world.

We will found our plans on the principles of sound public finances, low taxes, free trade and effective regulation. With our modern industrial strategy, we will build an economy that invests for the long term and supports growth across the whole country. I want to see a Conservative government complete the devolution of corporation tax to enable

Northern Ireland to compete more equitably with Ireland for inward investment.

As the United Kingdom leaves the European Union we will work to ensure that Northern Ireland's unique circumstances are protected and advanced. We will work to maintain the Common Travel Area, which has served us so well for nearly a century, and to ensure as seamless and frictionless a border as possible between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Under Theresa May's leadership we are determined to get the best deal for Northern Ireland and for the UK as a whole.

We will continue to seek the implementation of the legacy bodies in the Stormont House Agreement as the best way to address Northern Ireland's past and provide better outcomes for victims and survivors. A new Conservative government will ensure that these bodies work in ways that are fair, balanced and proportionate and do not unfairly focus on former soldiers or police officers.

A new Conservative government will fulfil its obligations to keep people safe and secure by giving our fullest possible support to the brave men and women of the PSNI and other agencies who do such a superb job. There will be no let-up in our determination to ensure that terrorism never succeeds. We will support further action to confront the blight of paramilitarism and its criminality which continues to hold too many communities back. Paramilitary activity has no place in Northern Ireland and we are determined to see that it is brought to an end..

This is the manifesto of a Conservative and Unionist Party that cares deeply about Northern Ireland as a very special part of our United Kingdom. If re-elected, we will spare no effort in working with all parts of the community to build that peaceful, stable and successful Northern Ireland that works for everyone. So let us go forward, together – for a stronger Northern Ireland and a prosperous future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', written in a cursive style.

James Brokenshire
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

STRONG AND STABLE LEADERSHIP

Like generations before us, we are living through a time of profound national change. At such moments, our country requires strong and stable leadership that is capable of taking the right long-term decisions for Northern Ireland and for the United Kingdom's future security and prosperity as a whole.

Since the referendum result last summer, that is what the UK Government has delivered. Despite predictions of immediate financial and economic danger, we have seen confidence remain high, record numbers of jobs and economic growth that has exceeded all expectations.

A new Conservative government will stick to the plan that has delivered stability and certainty. Over and above this plan, we know that we need to take the right long-term decisions for our future security and prosperity. In doing so, we will make sure that the United Kingdom not only meets the challenges of the future but grasps the opportunities these challenges present.

This manifesto offers our vision for Northern Ireland, as part of a stronger United Kingdom, not just for the next five years but for the years and decades beyond.

Governing from the mainstream

We will govern in the manner established by Theresa May since she became prime minister last year. We must reject the ideological templates provided by the socialist left and the libertarian right and instead embrace the mainstream view that recognises the good that government can do.

Rather than pursue an agenda based on a supposed centre ground defined and established by elites in Westminster, we will govern in the interests of the mainstream of the British public. We will get on with the job and take Britain out of the European Union. We will restore the public finances and maintain economic stability. We will reduce and control immigration. We will be resolute in defending the country from terrorism and other security threats.

Under the strong and stable leadership of Theresa May, there will be no ideological crusades. The government's agenda will not be allowed to drift to the right. Our starting point is that we should take decisions on the basis of what works. And we will always be guided by what matters to the ordinary, working families of this nation.

We will govern in the interests of ordinary, working families

As Theresa May said when she first became prime minister, the work of the government under her leadership will be driven not for the benefit of a privileged few but by the interests of ordinary, working families: people who have a job but do not always have job security; people who own their own home but worry about paying the mortgage; people who can just about manage but worry about the cost of living. These families want to get on with their lives, to do their best for their children, to have a fair chance. Under Theresa May's leadership, they will no longer be ignored.

We believe in the good that government can do

To do that, we will need a state that is strong and strategic, nimble and responsive to the needs of people. While it is never true that government has all the answers, government can and should be a force for good – and its power should be put squarely at the service of this country's working people.

Government alone cannot solve every challenge our country faces. Without business and enterprise, there would be no prosperity and no public services. Without the obligations and duties of citizenship, society would not function. Without individual responsibility, nothing can be achieved. But for a country to remain stable, an economy to be strong, a society to stay healthy, we need a partnership between the individual and the wider nation, between private sector and public service, and the strong leadership only government can provide.

Our principles

We believe these things not despite the fact that we are Conservatives but because we are Conservatives.

Because Conservatism is not and never has been the philosophy described by caricaturists. We do not believe in untrammelled free markets. We reject the cult of selfish individualism. We abhor social division, injustice, sectarianism, unfairness and inequality. We see rigid dogma and ideology not just as needless but dangerous.

True Conservatism means a commitment to country and community; a belief not just in society but the good that government can do; a respect for the local and national institutions that bind us together; an insight that change is inevitable and change can be good, but that change should be shaped, through strong leadership and clear principles, for the common good.

We know that our responsibility to one another is greater than the rights we hold as individuals. We know that we all have obligations to one another, because that is what community and nation demands. We understand that nobody, however powerful, has succeeded alone and that we all therefore have a debt to others. We respect the fact that

society is a contract between the generations: a partnership between those who are living, those who have lived before us, and those who are yet to be born.

A vision of a stronger Northern Ireland, a stronger UK and a prosperous future

If we allow ourselves to be directed by these principles, if we have strong and stable leadership, and if we address the challenges faced by the United Kingdom, we believe that the future of our country is a bright one.

We are already the fifth largest economy in the world, the biggest recipient of foreign investment in Europe and the fastest growing economy in the G7. Northern Ireland is one of the most popular UK destinations for inward investment. The UK has the finest intelligence services and hugely respected armed forces that can project power around the globe. So there is no doubt that a country as great as ours can – with strong and stable leadership – rise to the giant challenges we face.

We are a great nation. We have a glorious history but we believe that our best days lie ahead of us. With this plan, with our proposals to establish a stronger Northern Ireland, a stronger United Kingdom and a prosperous future we will, as a nation, go forward, together.

1. A STRONG NORTHERN IRELAND IN A CHANGING WORLD

Our precious Union

The Conservative and Unionist Party will never be neutral in expressing our support for the Union. Our steadfast belief is that Northern Ireland's future is best served within a stronger United Kingdom. As we leave the European Union the precious bonds that bring together the four parts of our United Kingdom are more important than ever. We are proud of what our country has achieved in the past and remain confident and optimistic about what we can do together in the future. Conservatives will, therefore, maintain Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom in accordance with the freely and legitimately given consent of the people who live here.

The principle that Northern Ireland's future should only ever be determined by democracy and consent was a fundamental part of the 1998 Belfast Agreement. A Conservative government will always uphold that principle. We will not countenance any constitutional arrangements – such as joint authority over Northern Ireland between the United Kingdom and Ireland – that are in any way incompatible with the consent principle.

At the same time, however, we fully recognise and respect the fact that a significant section of society in Northern Ireland legitimately regards itself as Irish and aspires to a united Ireland. The Belfast Agreement itself allows for people living in Northern Ireland to identify as British, Irish or both. While our clear preference is for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom we have always made clear that, in accordance with the 1998 Agreement, it is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide and we will always back their democratic wishes.

In our view, however, all reliable tests of opinion continue to demonstrate that a clear majority of people living in Northern Ireland continue to support the Union and that this is unlikely to change for at least the foreseeable future. The circumstances set out in the 1998 Agreement that require the Secretary of State to hold a border poll on Irish unification are therefore not satisfied.

Our commitment to the 1998 Belfast Agreement and its successors remains steadfast. These include the constitutional provisions they set; full range of political institutions they establish; and those matters relating to rights, culture and identity. A Conservative government will stand by the agreements that remain the bedrock of the significant progress that has been achieved since a Conservative government began Northern Ireland's peace process in the 1990s.

Our commitment to devolution

Conservatives are a party of devolution. We believe that decisions over local services are best taken by local politicians in locally accountable political institutions.

For that reason we have worked closely with all Northern Ireland's political leaders to sustain devolved government over the past seven years. We negotiated the Stormont House Agreement in 2014 and the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015, both of which helped to prevent a potential collapse of devolution.

For Conservatives, it is deeply regrettable that, following the longest unbroken run of devolved government since the 1960s, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly are currently not functioning. Despite an Assembly election in March and seven weeks of negotiations, Northern Ireland remains without the stable and inclusive devolved government which the public wants and for which it voted. As a result other bodies set out in the Belfast Agreement, such as those dealing with North-South matters, are also unable to function effectively. Budgets are currently being administered by civil servants with no ministerial direction. A return to functioning devolved government is also crucial to ensure that Northern Ireland is fully represented as the United Kingdom negotiates its departure from the EU.

In April, the Government passed legislation enabling the Assembly to meet and an Executive to be formed at any point until 29th June. It will be the first priority of a Conservative government to work intensively with the Northern Ireland parties and, as appropriate, the Irish Government, to restore a fully functioning inclusive Executive and Assembly. We want to avoid any return to direct rule, but in the continued absence of a functioning devolved administration, a Conservative government will do all that is necessary to provide the good governance and political stability that Northern Ireland needs, including political decision-making from Westminster if that is what is required.

Once devolution is restored we will consider what further measures are needed to provide additional stability and confidence in the devolved political institutions. A Conservative government will introduce increased transparency of political donations.

The three-stranded approach

In any negotiations, a Conservative government will work in full accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach to Northern Ireland affairs which is reflected in the 1998 Agreement. This means that while as a signatory to the Agreement there are matters that fall within the responsibility of the Irish Government, the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, strand one, are for the United Kingdom Government and the Northern Ireland parties alone to decide. A Conservative government will always stand by the three-stranded approach.

Co-operation with Ireland

The United Kingdom and Ireland have a unique relationship. We are tied together by history, geography, family, culture, identity, business and trade. Over recent years, we have put past disputes and enmities behind us so that today our two countries are

unquestionably closer than at any point since Irish independence nearly a century ago. In 2016 we saw how potentially sensitive anniversaries that might once have divided us are now handled in ways that are inclusive, respectful, and promote shared mutual understanding. We will continue to work closely with the Irish Government during this so-called 'decade of centenaries'. In June 2017, there will be a shared UK-Irish commemoration to mark the centenary of the Battle of Messines.

For many years, successive UK and Irish governments have worked to promote political stability in Northern Ireland. The closeness of the relationship between us has been a key factor in the progress that has been made in recent years. A Conservative government will continue to support close co-operation with Ireland, while recognising that ultimate responsibility for political stability in Northern Ireland continues to rest with the United Kingdom Government.

Shared institutions of Union

For too long, power in the United Kingdom has been centred in London. This means opportunity has centred in London too. It is time major cities around the United Kingdom shared in the government of the United Kingdom. For our civil service and major cultural bodies to claim to be UK institutions, they need to represent and be present across our whole United Kingdom. It is also wrong that while some of our major cultural institutions have made efforts to gain a presence across the UK, others have not.

We will put this right. Starting with the UK Government's arm's-length bodies, we will start moving significant numbers of UK Government civil servants and other public servants out of London and the south east to cities around the UK. We will ensure that senior posts move too, so that operational headquarters as well as administrative functions are centred not in London but around the UK. And we will do so in a way that encourages the development of new clusters of public services, private businesses and, where appropriate, universities.

We will proceed on the same basis with the arts and cultural organisations that give our United Kingdom such strength. We will work with the nation's most eminent museums and galleries to ensure their works and expertise are shared across the country.

United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund

We believe in one nation – in helping every part of our country share in the prosperity and opportunity of our great United Kingdom. Yet there is much to do. Current EU-wide structural funding was designed to tackle disparities but it is often expensive to administer and poorly targeted. As we leave the European Union, we must look at how we can better reduce and eliminate these inequalities.

We will use the structural fund money that comes back to the UK following Brexit to create

a United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund, specifically designed to reduce inequalities between communities across our four nations. The money that is spent will help deliver sustainable, inclusive growth based on our modern industrial strategy. We will consult widely on the design of the fund, including with the devolved administrations, local authorities, businesses and public bodies. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be cheap to administer, low in bureaucracy and targeted where it is needed most.

LEAVING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Following the historic referendum on 23rd June 2016, the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union. Only the Conservative Party, under Theresa May's strong and stable leadership, can negotiate the best possible deal for our country. In her Lancaster House Speech, the prime minister laid out the twelve principles she intends to follow in seeking a new deep and special partnership with the European Union. We have explained our approach in the White Paper on the United Kingdom's Exit from, and a new relationship with, the European Union, during the passage of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act, in the prime minister's letter to the president of the European Council invoking Article 50, and in the Great Repeal Bill White Paper.

We want to agree a deep and special partnership with the European Union. This partnership will benefit both the European Union and the United Kingdom: while we are leaving the European Union, we are not leaving Europe, and we want to remain committed partners and allies to our friends across the continent.

The negotiations will undoubtedly be tough, and there will be give and take on both sides, but we continue to believe that no deal is better than a bad deal for the UK. But we will enter the negotiations in a spirit of sincere co-operation and committed to getting the best deal for the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland.

As we leave the European Union, we will no longer be members of the single market or customs union but we will seek a deep and special partnership including a comprehensive free trade and customs agreement. There may be specific European programmes in which we might want to participate and if so, it will be reasonable that we make a contribution. We will determine a fair settlement of the UK's rights and obligations as a departing member state, in accordance with the law and in the spirit of the UK's continuing partnership with the EU. The principle, however, is clear: the days of the UK making vast annual contributions to the European Union will end.

We want fair, orderly negotiations, minimising disruption and giving as much certainty as possible – so both sides benefit. We believe it is necessary to agree the terms of our

future partnership alongside our withdrawal, reaching agreement on both within the two years allowed by Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

Protecting Northern Ireland's interests

A Conservative government is committed to making a success of leaving the EU for the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. We will ensure that Northern Ireland's particular interests are protected and advanced.

Northern Ireland's economy is deeply integrated with that of Ireland particularly in sectors like agri-foods. For example, around 30 per cent of the milk produced on Northern Ireland's farms is exported for processing in Ireland. More than 10,000 live pigs are exported from Ireland to Northern Ireland every week. Many local markets happen to be across what in recent years has become an almost 'invisible' border. In addition there is a single electricity market across the island of Ireland. This provides both Ireland and Northern Ireland with affordable, sustainable and secure access to electricity for both businesses and domestic customers.

Northern Ireland's economy is also deeply integrated with that of the rest of the United Kingdom. The value of sales by Northern Ireland-based companies to the rest of the UK is worth four times as much as sales with Ireland. As we exit the EU, we will ensure that the integrity of the UK single market is protected.

As the United Kingdom leaves the European Union we are determined to build on the strong and historic ties and unique relationship we have with Ireland. We will protect the Common Travel Area that has provided free movement of people between the UK and Ireland (and the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) since the 1920s. We will seek to maintain as frictionless a border as possible for people, goods and services between Northern Ireland and Ireland. We will uphold the rights of people in Northern Ireland to identify as British, Irish or both and our other commitments under the Belfast Agreement. We will maintain the special status of Irish citizens in the UK and protect reciprocal arrangements for British citizens in Ireland. We recognise the importance of securing effective arrangements for the continued supply of electricity on the island of Ireland following our departure from the EU. We will maintain strong cross-border co-operation on policing and justice matters, which is so important in the fight against terrorism and organised crime.

Repatriating EU law to the United Kingdom

We will enact a Great Repeal Bill. Our laws will be made in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and interpreted by judges across the United Kingdom, not in Luxembourg. The bill will convert EU law into UK law, allowing businesses and individuals to go about life knowing that the rules have not changed overnight. This approach means that the rights of workers and protections given to consumers and the environment by EU law

will continue to be available in UK law at the point at which we leave the EU. The bill will also create the necessary powers to correct the laws that do not operate appropriately once we have left the EU, so our legal system can continue to function correctly outside the EU. Once EU law has been converted into domestic law, parliament will be able to pass legislation to amend, repeal or improve any piece of EU law it chooses, as will the devolved legislatures, where they have the power to do so.

As powers return from the EU, we will be able to determine the level best placed to take decisions on these issues, ensuring that power sits closer to the people of the United Kingdom than ever before. We expect that the outcome will be a significant increase in the decision-making power of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly but we must also ensure that as we leave the EU no new barriers to living and doing business within our own union are created. In some areas, this will require common UK frameworks. We will work closely with an incoming Executive to deliver an approach that works for the whole of the United Kingdom and reflects the needs of Northern Ireland.

As well as the Great Repeal Bill, we will bring forward a number of additional bills to ensure that when we have left the EU there is a clear statutory basis for United Kingdom authorities to exercise powers that are currently exercised through EU law and institutions.

We will not bring the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights into UK law. We will not repeal or replace the Human Rights Act while the process of Brexit is underway but we will consider our human rights legal framework when the process of leaving the EU concludes. We will remain signatories to the European Convention on Human Rights for the duration of the next parliament.

2. A NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

As in the rest of the United Kingdom, a Conservative government is committed to building an economy that works for everyone and not just the privileged few. Northern Ireland has shared in the revival of the UK economy in recent years and benefits immensely from the strength and security of being part of one of the world's leading advanced economies.

There are more people in work in Northern Ireland than in early 2010 while the unemployment rate has fallen from over 7 per cent in early 2010 to 5.3 per cent today. We are also making progress in rebalancing the economy, with private sector jobs up by 4.1 per cent over the year from the end of 2015 to the end of 2016.

For all the economic progress that has been made in Northern Ireland, there is still much more to do to promote an entrepreneurial, enterprise-driven economy and to improve productivity. The economy is still far too over-dependent on the public sector.

Dealing with the deficit

The greatest impact a government can have on future generations is the amount it chooses to borrow to pay for current spending. Borrowing always means spending money you do not have; but government borrowing differs because the repayment falls to others – those who come later, including people not yet born. Conservatives believe in balancing the books and paying down debts – because it is wrong to pass to future generations a bill you cannot or will not pay yourself.

The next Conservative government will continue the difficult but necessary work of restoring our public finances while still ensuring that we are investing for the future. We will continue to aim for a balanced budget by the middle of the next decade, in line with the fiscal rules announced by the chancellor in his autumn statement last year.

Increasing trade

As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland continues to punch above its weight on the world stage. Exports are currently valued at £7.7 billion, a 14.6 per cent increase on the baseline year of 2014-15.

Northern Ireland remains one of the UK's most popular locations for foreign direct investment, with over 900 international companies employing in excess of 75,000 people. In 2016-17 twenty-two new companies chose to locate in Northern Ireland. Belfast is one of the world's top locations for financial services technologies investments.

Businesses are attracted by things like its competitive cost base, the quality of the workforce, advanced telecommunications infrastructure, its two world-class universities and the overall quality of life that Northern Ireland has to offer. Many of Northern Ireland's home-grown businesses continue to thrive on the global stage.

As we leave the European Union, we want to negotiate a new deep and special partnership with the EU, which will allow free trade between the UK and the EU's member states. As part of the agreement we strike, we want to make sure that there are as few barriers to trade and investment as possible. Leaving the European Union also means we will be free to strike our own trade agreements with countries outside the EU.

We will create a network of Her Majesty's Trade Commissioners to head nine new regional overseas posts. These commissioners will lead export promotion, investment and trade policy overseas. We will reconvene the Board of Trade with a membership specifically charged with ensuring that we increase exports from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales as well as England, and that trade policy is directly influenced by every part of our United Kingdom.

We will work to forge a new culture of exporting among UK businesses, equipping them with the tools and opportunities they need to succeed in the global marketplace, and take advantage of new high-growth markets around the world.

We will take a more active role in supporting UK consortia to win the largest and most innovative contracts around the world. We will ensure that small and medium-sized businesses are able to identify the right markets and sectors to win vital contracts abroad. We will put UK Export Finance, which ensures that no viable UK export fails for lack of finance or insurance, at the heart of the UK's trade promotion proposition. And we will encourage the world to visit, study and do business in the UK through the GREAT Britain and Northern Ireland campaign.

A Conservative government will work with the Executive and Invest NI to harness the benefits and opportunities of trade initiatives for Northern Ireland businesses.

Keeping taxes as low as possible

Paying your fair share of tax is the price of living in a civilised democracy but politicians should never forget that taxes are levied on businesses that employ people, and individuals who work hard and face tough decisions about how they spend their money. The Conservatives will always be the party that keeps tax as low as possible and spends the proceeds responsibly. It is our firm intention to reduce taxes on the UK's businesses and working families. By 2020, we will, as promised, increase the personal allowance to £12,500 and the higher rate to £50,000. We will not increase the level of Value Added Tax.

A good tax system is not just about the headline rates of tax, however, but about its simplicity. Our system remains too complicated, making it hard for people – especially self-employed people and small businesses – to assess their taxes. We will therefore simplify the tax system.

Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland

Corporation Tax is due to fall to seventeen per cent by 2020 – the lowest rate of any developed economy – and we will stick to that plan, because it will help to bring huge investment and many thousands of jobs to the UK. Conservatives continue to believe that the devolution of Corporation Tax powers to the Executive, and subsequent reduction, could have a significant impact in attracting jobs and investment to Northern Ireland and promoting greater prosperity across the community.

A Conservative government will, therefore, remain committed to the devolution of Corporation Tax powers in accordance with the terms set out in the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements regarding the stability and sustainability of the Executive's finances. Yet for this to be able to happen, Northern Ireland requires a stable and fully functioning Executive.

City Deals

In 2016 we passed legislation to ensure that Enhanced Capital Allowances could be offered within the pilot Enterprise Zone near Coleraine. We will work with an incoming Executive to look at how City Deals can be developed in Northern Ireland in order to boost investment and help unlock the full potential of Northern Ireland.

Funding support to Northern Ireland

We have continued to recognise Northern Ireland's special circumstances with generous assistance through the block grant from the Treasury. The Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements provide the Executive with up to £2.5 billion in additional spending power. The current block grant allocation for the 2017-18 financial year is £11 billion in cash terms. Public spending per head is some 25 per cent higher than in England and 21 per cent above the UK average. Following the spring 2017 Budget, an incoming Northern Ireland Executive's resource budget will increase by almost £90 million through to 2019-20 and its capital budget by over £30 million through to 2020-21.

Guaranteeing a decent wage

We must first ensure that everyone is paid fairly for their work. It was a Conservative government that introduced the National Living Wage and as a result, people across Northern Ireland now receive a minimum of £7.50 an hour. A new Conservative government will continue to increase the National Living Wage to 60 per cent of median earnings by 2020 and then by the rate of median earnings, so that people who are on the lowest pay benefit from the same improvements in earnings as higher paid workers.

Northern Ireland and our modern industrial strategy

Our modern industrial strategy is designed to deliver a stronger economy that works for everyone – where wealth and opportunity are spread across every community and help young people to develop the skills they need to do the high-paid, high-skilled jobs

of the future. And it will back the UK for the long term: creating the conditions where successful businesses can emerge and grow, and helping them to invest in the future of our nation.

The strategy is not about picking winners, propping up failing industries, or bringing back old companies from the dead. It is about identifying the industries that are of strategic value to our economy and supporting and promoting them through policies on trade, tax, infrastructure, skills, training, and research and development – just as in every other major and growing economy in the world. We will help industries make the most of supply chains in the UK. It is about identifying the places that have the potential to contribute towards economic growth and become homes to millions of new jobs. And, because this is about meeting our economy's long-term challenges, the industrial strategy will focus on creating the right institutional framework to make the strategy last for decades to come.

A Conservative government will seek to ensure that our modern industrial strategy helps to build an economy in Northern Ireland fit to deal with the challenges that lie ahead. We will engage extensively with business and industry to maximise the positive impact that the strategy can have in Northern Ireland, creating high-skilled jobs and helping businesses to grow and prosper. We will also work with an incoming Executive to strengthen co-operation on skills, job-creation and boosting productivity.

Supporting industries to succeed

Our modern industrial strategy is not about 'planning' the economy. It is about helping old industries find prosperous new life and unlock future opportunities, and supporting new industries to grow.

Some industries have a great history. We believe they can have a great future too. We have already demonstrated that in advanced manufacturing, such as aero and automotive engineering, we can lead the world. We will continue to support these key industries so that they can grow further. We want to replicate that success in other sectors – like shipbuilding where, for the first time in decades, there is the prospect of a renaissance. We will take forward Sir John Parker's review of shipbuilding, helping our shipyards modernise and collaborate. We want to see shipbuilding growing on the Clyde and on the Forth, in Belfast and in Barrow, and in the north east and south of England.

Other industries are already highly successful. Life sciences, for example, employs 175,000 people across the UK and many of the world's top medicines have been developed in the UK. The life sciences sector in Northern Ireland is particularly strong. We will continue to support research into the diagnosis and treatment of rare cancers and other diseases. This, together with the development of stronger research links with the NHS, can help scientists and doctors design more effective and personalised treatments, and help maintain our position as the European hub for life sciences.

National Productivity Investment Fund

If our modern industrial strategy is to succeed, it must address the UK's slow productivity growth and it must be funded properly from the start. So we have launched a new £23 billion National Productivity Investment Fund. The government will target this spending at areas that are critical for productivity: housing, research and development, economic infrastructure and skills. This will bring significant benefits to Northern Ireland, including additional infrastructure capital funding enabling an Executive to invest in key projects to support future growth.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES FROM A STRONGER ECONOMY

Our countryside communities

Across the UK, we will bring sustainable growth to the rural economy and boost our rural areas, so that people who live in the countryside have the same opportunities as those who live in our towns and cities. In Northern Ireland, agriculture is often described as the backbone of the local economy and our agri-food produce ranks with the best in the world.

We have huge ambitions for our farming industry: we are determined to grow more, sell more and export more great UK food. We want to provide stability to farmers as we leave the EU and set up new frameworks for supporting food production and stewardship of the countryside. So we will continue to commit the same cash total in funds for farm support until the end of the parliament. We will work with farmers, food producers and environmental experts across the UK and with the devolved administrations, including the Northern Ireland Executive, to devise a new agri-environment system, to be introduced in the following parliament.

Finally, we pledge to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it. That is why we shall produce a comprehensive 25 Year Environment Plan that will chart how we will improve our environment as we leave the European Union and take control of our environmental legislation again.

Our coastal communities

Decades of profound economic change have left their mark on coastal communities around the United Kingdom. When we leave the European Union and its Common Fisheries Policy, we will be fully responsible for the access and management of the waters where we have historically exercised sovereign control. A new Conservative government will work with the fishing industry and with our world-class marine scientists, as well as the devolved administrations including the Northern Ireland Executive, to introduce a

new regime for commercial fishing that will preserve and increase fish stocks and help to ensure prosperity for a new generation of fishermen. To provide complete legal certainty to our neighbours and clarity during our negotiations with the European Union, we will withdraw from the London Fisheries Convention. We will continue our work to conserve the marine environment off the coast of the United Kingdom.

Supporting better schools and hospitals

We want to make the UK the world's Great Meritocracy: a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow, where advantage is based on merit not privilege. To succeed, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that everyone, no matter who they are or where they are from, can have a world-class education. While education in Northern Ireland is devolved, we believe in seeing children from all communities being taught together rather than being taught apart. We are committed through the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements to providing up to £500 million of new capital funding to support shared and integrated education over 10 years. Our pledge to increase the overall schools budget in England by £4 billion by 2022, representing a real terms increase for every year of the parliament, will benefit Northern Ireland through the Barnett formula.

The Conservative Party believes in the founding principles of the NHS. First, that the service should meet the needs of everyone, no matter who they are or where they live. Second, that care should be based on clinical need, not the ability to pay. Third, that care should be free at the point of use. In England, we will increase NHS spending by a minimum of £8 billion in real terms over the next five years. Through the operation of the Barnett Formula this will provide further financial support which can be used for the health service in Northern Ireland.

Security in old age

A decade ago, pensions were in crisis and poverty blighted the retirement of many older people. It was wrong and it has been a Conservative government that has helped to put it right. By introducing the Pensions Triple Lock and the new State Pension, we have lifted the incomes of millions of older people, reducing pensioner poverty to historically low levels. The Triple Lock has worked: it is now time to set pensions on an even course. So we will keep our promise to maintain the Triple Lock until 2020, and when it expires we will introduce a new Double Lock, meaning that pensions will rise with the earnings that pay for them, or in line with inflation – whichever is highest. We will also ensure that the state pension age reflects increases in life expectancy, while protecting each generation fairly.

A stronger society

Conservatives abhor division and sectarianism, and the efforts of those who would tear society apart. We believe in one, united Northern Ireland in which everybody can get on to the best of their ability, regardless of their community background or ultimate

political aspirations. We want to build a Northern Ireland that everybody is proud to call home. Today, far too many elements of Northern Ireland society remain divided along sectarian grounds, such as education and public housing. Interface barriers, or so-called peace walls, divide communities in parts of Belfast and elsewhere. While addressing community divisions is primarily a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive and its agencies, the UK Government also has a role to play. In the 2013 Economic Pact and the 2014 Stormont House Agreement we provided support and funding for schemes designed to promote more shared housing, as well as shared and integrated education. A new Conservative government will continue to work with an incoming Executive in making progress in this key area.

3. ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S PAST

Despite the great progress that has been made in Northern Ireland over recent years, the legacy of the troubles still casts a large shadow over many aspects of society. It has the capacity to sour community relations and destabilise politics. We recognise the continuing pain and suffering of victims, which in many cases is as raw today as it was decades ago. In addition, we accept that the current mechanisms for addressing the past and helping victims and survivors simply do not work as they should.

We recognise concerns that, taken overall, investigations into the past have become disproportionately focused on the security forces rather than republican and loyalist terrorists. This is not a criticism of any individuals, not least the police and prosecuting authorities, all of whom uphold the law independently of government. Rather, it is a recognition that we need new and better structures for addressing these issues and to help those who suffered most in the troubles.

The 2014 Stormont House Agreement – negotiated over 11 weeks by the UK Government, the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government – set out the most far reaching structures yet to address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past. The agreement envisages four new bodies: an Historical Investigations Unit to take forward outstanding investigations into troubles-related deaths; the Independent Commission for Information Retrieval, to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the deaths of their next-of-kin; an Oral History Archive; and an Implementation and Reconciliation Group.

In the agreement, the UK Government pledged up to £150 million over five years to help fund the new legacy bodies. We continue to believe that, taken together, they have the potential to provide better outcomes for dealing with the past and we remain committed to their establishment. Ultimately, our objective is to enable Northern Ireland to move forward.

Since 2014 the Government has worked with Northern Ireland’s political parties – through the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement and beyond – to turn the Stormont House Agreement into detailed legislation. Much progress has been made and we now believe that the next phase is to consult publicly on the details of how the new structures would work in practice. We will also continue to support reforms to the legacy inquest system to ensure the UK complies with its international obligations.

At the heart of any legislation will be clear obligations on the new bodies to operate in ways that are fair, balanced and proportionate and which do not unfairly focus on former members of the armed forces and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Conservatives will always salute the tremendous heroism and courage displayed by the armed forces and the RUC in upholding democracy and the rule of law. We know that without them the peace process would never have happened and we will always remember the debt of

gratitude we owe them. A Conservative government will reject any attempts to rewrite the history of the past that seeks to justify or legitimise republican or loyalist terrorism.

We also continue to believe that any approach to the past must be fully consistent with the rule of law. Conservatives in government have consistently said that we will not introduce amnesties or immunities from prosecution. The new legacy bodies will have the needs of victims and survivors at their heart. Consistent with the Stormont House Agreement, however, we will ensure that no information is released as part of investigations into the past that puts any individuals at risk, or weakens our fundamental duty to keep people safe and secure.

4. KEEPING NORTHERN IRELAND SAFE AND SECURE

The security situation in Northern Ireland is transformed since the dark days of the troubles. Northern Ireland remains one of the safest places in the United Kingdom in which to live. Despite this, however, there remain small numbers of dissident republicans who reject democracy and continue to pursue their objective of a united Ireland by terrorism. They act in complete defiance of the clearly expressed will of people in Northern Ireland and Ireland who overwhelmingly back the current political settlement.

While dissident republican terrorists remain small in number, they retain lethal intent and capability. Since 2010 they have murdered one police officer, Ronan Kerr in 2011 and two prison officers, David Black in 2012 and Adrian Ismay in 2016. The overall security situation in Northern Ireland remains Severe – as it has been since March 2009 – meaning that an attack remains highly likely. Earlier this year a police officer was shot and wounded in a sickening attack at a petrol station in Belfast and another officer had an improvised explosive device placed under his car outside his family home.

Protecting national security

The fact that more people in Northern Ireland are not directly affected by the terrorist threat is down to the hard work, courage and professionalism of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and MI5. They do a superb job in helping to protect the public. Co-operation between the PSNI and the Irish police force An Garda Síochána is also at its best ever and a number of terrorist operations planned for Northern Ireland have been thwarted south of the border due to the activities of both police services working together. We are determined that this co-operation will continue following the UK's departure from the EU.

While day to day policing in Northern Ireland is devolved, protecting national security remains the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government. There is no greater responsibility than the safety and security of the people of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole. We will work with an incoming Northern Ireland Executive to improve criminal justice outcomes – ensuring that those engaged in terrorist or paramilitary activity are dealt with more quickly and put behind bars for longer.

In the 2010 Parliament we gave £230 million in additional security funding to the PSNI. Following the 2015 Election we allocated £160 million over the course of the spending review period. A Conservative government will always give the fullest possible support to the brave men and women of the PSNI and our security services.

TACKLING PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY

So-called paramilitary activity remains far too prevalent and embedded within parts of the community in Northern Ireland. Those engaged serve no political cause. They commit crime – including smuggling, fuel laundering, drug dealing and extortion – under the ‘paramilitary’ cloak to line their own pockets. They use brutal intimidation – such as so-called ‘punishment’ shootings, sometimes by appointment – and fear to exert influence and control within their communities. They hold communities back, deterring investment and jobs and preventing people from moving forward with their lives. It is our clear view that paramilitary groups were never justified in the past, they are not justified today and they should disband.

The 2015 Fresh Start Agreement contained significant new obligations on elected representatives to work to end all forms of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. These included declarations by Executive Ministers and Assembly members. In addition, the Executive established a three-member panel on the disbandment of paramilitary groups which reported in May 2016 and was followed by an action plan published by the Executive in July 2016.

For our part, we strongly support efforts to tackle paramilitarism and organised crime in Northern Ireland. Through the Fresh Start Agreement the UK Government is providing £25 million of funding to help ensure that the relevant agencies are appropriately resourced to fulfil that commitment. Last year we passed legislation to establish a new Independent Reporting Commission to report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity.

A Conservative government will continue to work closely with an incoming Executive to implement its strategy for tackling paramilitary activity. We need to prevent people being lured into paramilitary groups in the first place, help communities stand up to paramilitaries and ensure the quickest and toughest penalties for the perpetrators. People need to feel the difference in their lives and we are determined to see that the malign influence of paramilitary activity is ended for good.

CONCLUSION

This is our plan for a stronger, more stable Northern Ireland and a prosperous future. This is our vision of one Northern Ireland where everyone is given the chance to go wherever their talents will take them. In this period of profound national change, we will only achieve our ambitions if we have the strong and stable leadership our national interest demands. With Theresa May and her team, we will secure the best possible deal with the European Union and chart a course to a new global future for the whole of the United Kingdom. Now is the time that we show, once again, our strength as a nation and the character of our united people. If we go forward, together, we shall succeed.

