



# OUR 5 POINT PLAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

# HELP WORKING FAMILIES

APRIL 2022

# Introduction

## Rt Hon Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP

**A**t this election I am campaigning on the basis of our 5-point plan for Northern Ireland. A key element of my plan is to help working families. I want to see this plan implemented after the election and with your support we can do just that.

We have a forty-year record of low local taxes. The DUP will use its mandate to help working families across our Province.

As part of our plan to help working families we will **deliver in the next mandate 30 hours free childcare per week for 3 and 4 year olds** and we will ensure there is fair access to pre-school places.

And we want to ensure working families are not forgotten **by delivering an Energy Support Payment to hard-pressed households.**

Our Priorities to help working families include:

- ✓ Deliver 30 hours free childcare per week for 3 and 4 year olds.
- ✓ Fair access to pre-school places.
- ✓ Financially support hard-pressed families with an Energy Support Payment.
- ✓ Deliver Energy Efficiency schemes to support better-insulated homes.
- ✓ Support calls for a Windfall Tax on energy firms.
- ✓ Make going green affordable to homes in Northern Ireland.

*Jeffrey Donaldson*



# Delivering 30 hours free childcare



**C**hildcare is one of the most significant household bills faced by many families across Northern Ireland. Last year we surveyed over 1,000 parents and found that nearly 85% of people had their return to work impacted by childcare costs. Almost a quarter of parents also said that childcare subsumed nearly a full wage within the household.

The most recent Employers for Childcare survey highlighted an average cost of £170 per week, which represents a very significant financial hurdle, yet Northern Ireland lags behind other UK regions in supporting working families. The DUP is determined to see this changed. Whilst some other parties have no plan other than a divisive border poll, we are focused on what matters - building a better Northern Ireland.

There is also pressure on childcare providers, and when this sector was facing collapse during lockdown, it was a DUP Minister who stepped up to support them.

We want to do more however and our 5-point plan for Northern Ireland includes a commitment to help working families through delivering 30 hours of free childcare per week for 3 and 4 year olds.

Northern Ireland should come into line with the rest of the United Kingdom in this area. We want to provide greater access to affordable childcare, which can benefit families, our economy and the whole of Northern Ireland.

DUP Ministers have supported the sector **with £36 million being paid to childcare providers**, to enable the sector to remain viable and childcare places to be available for families, at a time when the essential role

played by early education and childcare to our broader society and economy was demonstrated more clearly than ever.

Now we want to do more. We will prioritise affordable, flexible, high-quality early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4. We will support working families by ensuring the availability of 30 hours free childcare per week.

As working arrangements change, we support the introduction of flexible childcare. We will engage with parents and employers to ensure the right model is co-designed going forward, and wrap around school provision will be improved to ensure access to childcare is strengthened. We will also work with the private sector to develop in-house programmes that work for both the employer and employee.

## Fair access to pre-school places

We believe that all children should have fair access to pre-school places, regardless of their parents' employment status. Every child in Northern Ireland deserves the same opportunities to succeed and early years learning and support is vital to helping each child reach their full potential. We will bring forward a review of pre-school place criteria and push for reforms to ensure that working families are not placed at a disadvantage.



## Financially support hard-pressed families with an energy support payment

Recent energy price rises are impacting on every person and business in Northern Ireland. This is happening because of the global price volatility that comes with fossil fuels.

The massive increase in energy demand as we came out of the pandemic lockdowns and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused an unprecedented increase in energy costs. Even before these events energy costs had been increasing at a steady rate. The result is that thousands of low and medium income families have been plunged into debt and forced to make hard choices when it comes to how they spend their limited budgets.

The DUP has been constantly lobbying both at Westminster and in Northern Ireland for short-term relief with energy bills and a long-term re-examination of energy policy.

In the short-term we have asked the government to: -

1. Reduce the VAT on electricity bills.
2. Lift some of the green taxes from electricity bills. They currently stand at 14% of the average bill.
3. Raise revenue for reliefs through levying a windfall tax on the profits of those companies who have had unexpected increases in profits due to the increase in world prices.
4. Consider reducing some of the taxes which are based on a percentage of fuel costs and which as prices rise have given the government a windfall increase in tax revenues.
5. Use trading standards and other means to monitor price increases at the pumps and other places where it is obvious some businesses are taking advantage of the current crisis.

It is worth noting that some garages are charging up to £1.80 per litre of petrol justifying this because the price of crude oil has at times gone up to over \$100 per barrel. Even when it was \$140 a barrel in 2008 petrol prices never reached this level. Clearly blatant profiteering is taking place and those businesses doing so need to be highlighted.

In the long term we must take actions to diversify our sources of energy, improve security of supply by producing more from indigenous sources and using research and development to cut costs and increase productivity to become more energy efficient.

Currently we rely on countries all around the world for most of our oil and gas. Many of these countries are run by despots who can use our reliance on their fuels to hold us to ransom either by colluding to put up prices or refusing to supply us.

In December 2021 the DUP Economy Minister launched the 'Path to Net Zero' energy strategy which sets out how we will work towards phasing out fossil fuels, ending this volatility and ensuring that more of the money we spend on energy stays in the local economy and helps to create wealth and jobs.

The UK benefits from a diverse energy mix, including nuclear. We should examine all options for diversifying our energy mix in Northern Ireland, and the need to improve the efficiency of batteries to store unused electricity, hydrogen technology and improving engine fuel performance all of which would enable a more secure energy supply and would be better value for money.

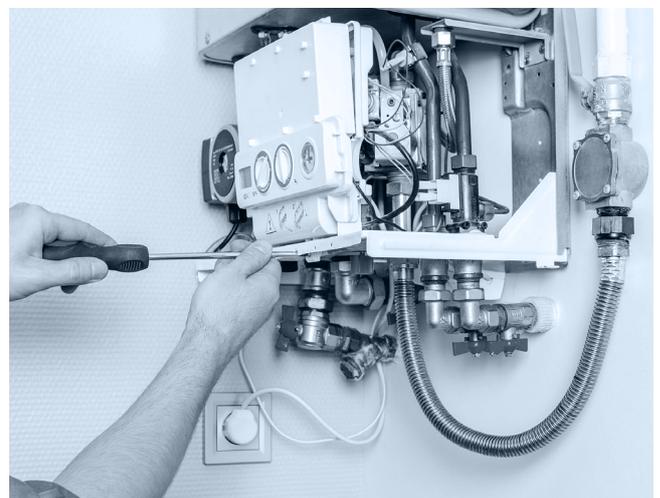
Northern Ireland is already a leader in renewable energy, but through investment in new technologies such as hydrogen, we aim to be a global leader in clean energy.

## Deliver energy efficiency schemes to support better-insulated homes

We support introducing building control policies and financial schemes to reduce the use of energy in homes and cut down electricity bills. We will deliver a priority programme of energy efficiency schemes focused on retrofitting both private and public housing across Northern Ireland and establish minimum energy efficiency standards in the domestic private rented sector. New packages encouraging greater efficiency in the home are vital.

## Make going green affordable to homes in Northern Ireland

Following a more environmentally friendly lifestyle and adapting homes to do this is something many people in Northern Ireland are keen to do. However, the costs involved can often be a barrier. In order to make the green transition, we have to ensure that it is affordable and provides value for money. We will look at options for support schemes for energy sources and heat installation measures across the home.







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