

PRESS RELEASE

TUESDAY 20 APRIL

Make your vote count, says Platform for Change

Use your vote, and use it wisely.

That was the message to citizens today from Platform for Change, the recently launched pressure group whose aim is 'a new politics for a new Northern Ireland'.

On the last day for voters to register to vote in the Westminster election, it called on political parties to address public disaffection from politics, reflected in falling electoral participation, particularly among young people. Platform for Change seeks to promote greater civic engagement in politics and a redefinition of the political agenda towards policy and day-to-day issues.

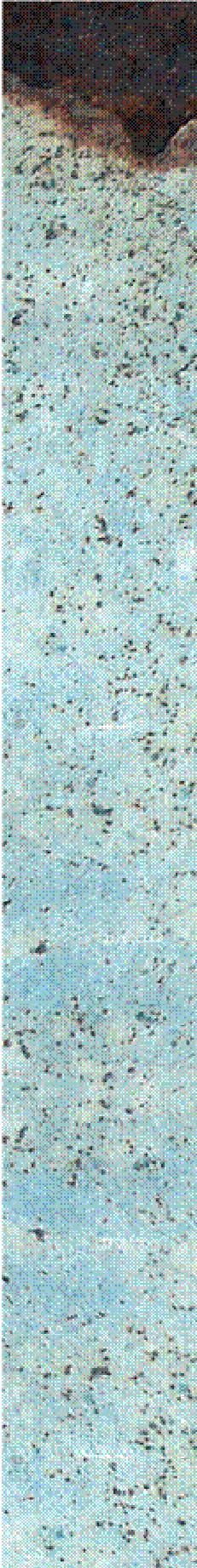
Today it said that the issue in this election was the intensity of the coming public expenditure squeeze, with its inevitable impact on the budget for the devolved government via the Barnett Formula. It called on candidates to make clear to voters how they intended to address this issue if elected and it urged electors to vote accordingly.

Platform for Change criticised the focus on sectarian headcounts and narrow calculations of community advantage, and called instead on electors to vote for candidates, of whichever party, who were committed to supporting sharing and a focus on the common good. The primary concern should be policies that would deliver for all the people of Northern Ireland, rather than tactical advantage of party or personality, the group said.

It warned that next year's assembly election was already casting a shadow, with debate being reduced to the question as to whether Martin McGuinness should be first minister, were his party to top the poll—and the associated prospect that power-sharing might again collapse. It demanded that all parties support the principle that the first minister and deputy first minister should hold their offices jointly and act impartially, removing the focus from the personality of the incumbent.

The secretary of the group, Nuala McKeever, said today: 'We need elected representatives to break free of the constraints of the old ways. We need a politics that is conducted in a different style—as a grown-up conversation with voters. And if that means us as individual citizens rethinking "traditional" voting patterns here in favour of tactical choices and policybased decisions, so be it.'

The chair, Robin Wilson, added: 'We need MPs who will be honest about facing the hard choices on taxing and spending at Westminster, particularly with a hung parliament likely. These bread-and-butter issues are what Northern Ireland voters increasingly want to dominate the political agenda. The parties must respond if they are to expect voters to turn out in numbers in their support.'



Notes to editors

Platform for Change supports:

- a politics focused on the public interest and the common good;
- a cohesive government in which power is genuinely shared;
- an assembly which gives the citizen a real voice; and
- a vision of a tolerant and inclusive society without dividing lines.

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