



Authenticating Emblem of the People of United Ulster

A DISCUSSION PAPER

Decentralized Direct Participation, Hyper-Local Decision-Making and the Public Interest

From the People of United Ulster

Date: 20 August 2026

This document is issued under the authenticating emblem of the People of United Ulster.

Population of United Ulster (confirmed figures):

- Northern Ireland (6 counties): ~1.93 million
- Republic of Ireland Ulster counties (3 counties): ~333,000
- Full nine-county United Ulster: ~2.26 million

This document sets out our collective analysis of the present distant, party-mediated and easily captured model of local and regional decision-making, the related problem of low continuous public engagement and decisions taken far from the streets and neighbourhoods they affect, the consequences for legitimacy, intergenerational continuity and the integrity of public institutions in the nine counties of United Ulster, and the principles and concrete framework we put forward. It draws on the Swiss tradition of frequent, issue-based direct democracy, modern digital participation platforms, and the practical realities of an open land border and dual legal systems, adapted to the constitutional settlement of British and Irish law and the Common Travel Area.

1. Who We Are and Why We Speak

We are the people of United Ulster — the historic nine counties that form one continuous territory: the six counties of Northern Ireland and the three Ulster counties of the Republic of Ireland.

The population of this territory stands as follows: Northern Ireland (6 counties) ~1.93 million; Republic of Ireland Ulster counties (3 counties) ~333,000; Full nine-county United Ulster ~2.26 million.

We live with the realities of the Common Travel Area, an open land border, dual legal systems, and the daily consequences of decisions made in London, Dublin and Belfast. We have watched debates on how power is exercised become polarised between those who

treat any demand for closer citizen control as illegitimate and those who offer only cynicism. Neither approach serves us.

A serious society must examine incentives, costs and consequences. This paper sets out what we have observed, what the experience of other jurisdictions shows, and the principles we believe should guide policy. We do not claim to speak for every person in United Ulster. We do claim the right, as citizens and residents of this place, to insist on clarity and honesty about how decisions that shape streets, services and neighbourhoods are made, and who genuinely holds the power to shape them, in a territory of approximately 2.26 million people.

2. Two Different Models of Decision-Making

There are, in essence, two ways a territory of this scale can structure the making of local and regional decisions.

Model One (distant representative and party-mediated)

Citizens vote infrequently for parties or candidates. Between elections, most decisions are taken by elected representatives, officials and organised interests operating at a remove from the specific place affected. Information is filtered, engagement is episodic, and the ordinary resident has limited practical ability to question decision-makers in real time or to force a focused vote on a concrete local issue. The system is vulnerable to capture by well-resourced groups, party machinery and remote bureaucratic priorities. Turnout on purely local matters is often low; the sense of ownership is weaker.

Model Two (continuous, hyper-local and direct)

Citizens receive timely notification of decisions that affect their own area. They can open a secure app or platform, receive clear independent information, ask questions directly of the panel or officials responsible, deliberate, and vote on the concrete proposal. Relevance is prioritised by location and declared interest, so a person in West Belfast is notified first about a Westlink matter while remaining free to examine and participate in a Derry issue if they choose. Decision-making becomes a regular civic habit rather than a rare event. The system is designed for transparency, resistance to hidden capture, and continuous accountability.

These are not abstract theories. Model One is the predominant pattern across most of the United Kingdom and Ireland today. Model Two is the direction already taken, in different forms, by Switzerland's long tradition of frequent referendums and initiatives, by digital platforms such as Decidim and Consul used in many European cities, and by emerging privacy-preserving and verifiable voting tools. It is the model better suited to a territory of 2.26 million people that experiences decisions from two capitals and an open border.

3. What the Current Approach Produces in United Ulster

Under present arrangements, local and regional decisions are filtered through party structures, council chambers and remote departments. Even when consultation exercises occur, they are often episodic, poorly publicised, or easily dominated by organised voices. The ordinary resident who simply wants to know what is proposed for their street, school catchment or local service, and to record a clear view, faces friction. Information is scattered. The ability to question decision-makers directly and in public is limited. Outcomes can appear predetermined or captured.

In a territory of approximately 2.26 million people the cumulative effect matters. When decisions that shape daily life are made at a distance and without continuous,

location-aware public scrutiny, legitimacy erodes. The same friction already observed in other domains — land, business control, services — reappears in the domain of democratic participation itself. People feel the system no longer serves them; it is too easily manipulated and too distant from the places it governs.

4. The Cost to the Local Community and to Intergenerational Continuity

Democratic participation is not a mere administrative process. It is the means by which the people who live in a place shape the rules and priorities that will govern the next generation. When decision-making remains distant, party-mediated and episodic, the next generation of Ulster people inherits institutions whose legitimacy is thinner and whose priorities can drift away from local realities.

The parallel with the earlier papers is exact. Just as weakly conditional citizenship multiplies membership without corresponding connection, and just as unrestricted external control of land and everyday retail transfers economic power, so a distant decision-making system multiplies formal representation without corresponding continuous local ownership of outcomes. The result is reduced trust, lower engagement, and a sense that the rules of the place are being set elsewhere.

5. The Cost to United Ulster under Dual Jurisdiction

United Ulster experiences these pressures under two legal systems and an open border. Decisions taken in London affect the six counties; decisions taken in Dublin affect the three counties. Local government structures differ. An open land border means that poor engagement or capture on one side can affect the lived experience on both. Unilateral digital experiments or consultation rules on one side can create inconsistency and arbitrage. The people who live with those consequences across the full 2.26 million population are entitled to examine whether the present balance between remote representation and local voice is sustainable.

6. Principles for a Better Framework

We do not call for the end of representative institutions. We call for rules and tools that are coherent, enforceable and honest about the need for continuous local ownership of decisions. Drawing on the Swiss practice of frequent issue-based voting, modern digital participation platforms, and the practical requirements of dual jurisdiction, we set out the following principles:

First, decision-making on matters that primarily affect a defined local area should be open to continuous, location-aware citizen participation. Residents of that area receive priority notification and, where appropriate, weighted influence, while any citizen or resident of United Ulster remains free to examine and participate.

Second, participation must be informed. Every proposal subject to public decision carries a clear, accessible information packet setting out facts, options, costs and impacts, together with a public channel for questions to the responsible panel or officials.

Third, the technical system must be transparent, verifiable and resistant to hidden manipulation. Votes and records should be publicly auditable while individual ballots remain private.

Fourth, outcomes begin as strongly advisory and may, by clear local or statutory decision, become binding on defined categories of local matter. The pathway from consultation to binding force must itself be transparent.

Fifth, British and Irish citizens continue to enjoy the full rights of the Common Travel Area. The participation framework applies across the nine counties on equal terms for those who belong here.

Sixth, the United Kingdom and Ireland should strengthen practical coordination on digital participation standards, identity verification for voting purposes, and the publication of local proposals so that the open land border does not become a barrier to coherent civic engagement.

These principles do not abolish representation. They raise the continuous local voice so that membership of the political community of a territory of 2.26 million people is expressed not only at infrequent elections but in the daily and weekly decisions that shape the place itself.

7. What We Ask

We ask politicians in London, Dublin and Belfast to stop treating the discussion of closer, continuous local control of decisions as morally or practically forbidden. The people of United Ulster — across Northern Ireland (~1.93 million) and the three Republic of Ireland counties (~333,000) — live with the results. We are entitled to examine incentives and outcomes.

We ask for a participation framework that is robust, transparent and fair in both directions — fair to the communities that must live with decisions, and fair to the long-term continuity and legitimacy of the territory itself. Fairness is not served by a system that keeps ordinary people at a permanent distance from the concrete choices that shape their streets and services.

We ask for honesty about the cumulative effect of distant decision-making on trust and engagement, and for the courage to design tools that restore continuous local ownership without denying the proper role of representative institutions.

We are the people of United Ulster. We share this place. We share the consequences of policy. We will continue to insist that questions of how decisions are made, who is notified, who can question, and who can vote on the matters that affect a defined area in a territory of 2.26 million people be treated as matters of practical governance and mutual responsibility, not as tests of ideological purity.

The choice is not between representation and chaos. It is between policies that acknowledge the structural distance of the present system and policies that pretend the distance does not matter. We choose the former.

End of Discussion Paper

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POLICY FRAMEWORK

Decentralized Direct Participation, Hyper-Local Decision Platforms and Related Civic Tools

Presented by the People of United Ulster

Applicable across the nine counties of United Ulster

(Northern Ireland — United Kingdom; and the Ulster counties of the Republic of Ireland)

High-Level Strategic Policy Advice — For Senior Government, Ministers and Cross-Border Bodies

Date: 20 August 2026

This framework is put forward by the People of United Ulster as a concrete expression of the principles set out in the preceding Discussion Paper. It is designed to operate within the existing constitutional settlement while delivering coherent, enforceable rules and tools for continuous, location-aware citizen participation in local and regional decisions. It draws on the architecture of Swiss direct democracy, existing open-source digital platforms (Decidim, Consul and related systems), and privacy-preserving verifiable voting methods, adapted to British and Irish law and the Common Travel Area. It is issued under the same authenticating emblem.

Population context: Northern Ireland (6 counties) ~1.93 million; Republic of Ireland Ulster counties (3 counties) ~333,000; Full nine-county United Ulster ~2.26 million.

1. Strategic Context and Governing Reality

United Ulster is not a single sovereign jurisdiction. It comprises six counties forming Northern Ireland (part of the United Kingdom) and three counties forming part of the Republic of Ireland. Any coherent policy must therefore operate within the existing constitutional settlement, the Common Travel Area, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and post-Brexit arrangements. Unilateral creation of a single digital democracy regime is neither legally feasible nor politically viable. The correct approach is structured coordination between the two sovereign governments, with devolved input from the Northern Ireland Executive and relevant local authorities where competence exists.

The objective is to design systems that:

- Maintain the integrity of representative institutions while adding continuous local voice.
- Ensure that residents of a defined area receive priority notification and practical opportunity to decide on matters primarily affecting that area.

- Provide clear, independent information and a public channel for questions to decision-makers.
- Deliver transparent, verifiable and privacy-preserving voting.
- Protect the long-term legitimacy of public institutions in a territory of approximately 2.26 million people.
- Avoid creating incentives for forum-shopping or regulatory arbitrage across the open land border.
- Provide clear, enforceable rules that local authorities, platform operators and citizens can apply with certainty.

2. Core Design Principles

1. Sovereignty with Coordination — Each state retains exclusive competence over its electoral and local-government law. Coordination occurs through formal intergovernmental mechanisms.
2. Location-Aware Priority — Residents of the affected area receive primary notification and, where statute or local decision provides, weighted influence; any citizen or resident of United Ulster may still participate.
3. Continuous and Informed Participation — Proposals are published with accessible information packets; a public Q&A channel to the responsible panel or officials is mandatory.
4. Transparency and Verifiability — Vote tallies and process records are publicly auditable; individual ballots remain private.
5. Progressive Legal Status — Outcomes begin as strongly advisory; defined categories of local matter may be made binding by clear local or statutory process.
6. CTA Protection — British and Irish citizens continue to enjoy full rights. The participation tools apply equally across the nine counties for those who belong here.
7. Anti-Capture Design — Platform rules, information standards and audit requirements are designed to resist hidden manipulation by organised interests or remote parties.
8. Digital Interoperability — Where legally permissible, common technical standards and data-sharing on published proposals and participation metrics should be strengthened between the two jurisdictions.

3. Participation Architecture

3.1 Eligibility and Relevance

Any British or Irish citizen, or lawfully resident person, connected to the nine counties may register. Relevance is determined by verified residential or declared interest area (postcode, ward, or defined neighbourhood). Priority notification and any local weighting apply to the primary affected area.

3.2 Proposal Publication and Information

Every proposal subject to public decision is published on the common platform with a plain-language summary, key facts, options, estimated costs and impacts, and supporting documents. An independent or multi-sided information packet is required.

3.3 Deliberation and Questioning

A structured public Q&A channel is attached to each proposal. Questions and answers are visible to all participants. Additional structured debate tools (points for and against) may

be used.

3.4 Voting

Secure digital voting (with paper or alternative options for those who require them) is available for a defined period. Results are published promptly and are auditable. Privacy of the individual ballot is protected by design.

3.5 Legal Effect

Default status is strongly advisory. Local authorities or the relevant legislature may, by transparent process, designate defined categories of purely local matter as binding subject to turnout or majority thresholds.

4. Operational Sequence (Recommended)

1. A local authority, statutory body or qualified citizen initiative publishes a proposal affecting a defined area.
2. The platform issues priority notifications to residents of that area and optional notifications to others.
3. Information packet and Q&A channel open.
4. Deliberation period runs.
5. Voting opens for a fixed period.
6. Results are published and archived with full audit trail.
7. The responsible body records the outcome and, where the matter is designated binding, implements or explains any deviation.
8. Cross-border proposals or impacts trigger coordinated notification between the two jurisdictions.

5. Cross-Border Coordination Mechanisms

Given the open land border and the Common Travel Area, the following high-level arrangements are recommended:

- Formal information-sharing protocols between the UK authorities (including the Northern Ireland Executive where relevant) and the Irish authorities on published local proposals, participation metrics and platform standards.
- Joint or parallel technical and information standards so that a resident moving or operating across the border experiences coherent rules.
- Coordinated approaches to identity verification for participation purposes and to the designation of binding local matters.
- Regular intergovernmental review of thresholds, platform integrity and enforcement data to prevent regulatory arbitrage.

These mechanisms must respect data-protection law, the Belfast Agreement, and the distinct constitutional positions of each state.

6. Expected Strategic Outcomes

- Residents of a defined area receive timely notice and a practical means to decide on matters that primarily affect them.
- Decision-making becomes a continuous civic habit rather than a rare event.
- Information and questioning channels reduce the scope for hidden capture.
- Public confidence in the legitimacy of local and regional institutions is strengthened.

- The Common Travel Area continues to function fully for British and Irish citizens.
- Policy remains predictable for legitimate local governance while remaining enforceable and transparent.

Recommendation

This framework should be developed further through formal intergovernmental channels — the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and relevant North-South bodies — with technical input from the relevant UK and Irish departments responsible for local government, digital services, electoral law and the Northern Ireland Executive. Detailed legislative, platform and operational drafting would follow once political agreement on the high-level principles is secured.

The document is put forward by the People of United Ulster and issued under our authenticating emblem. It respects the constitutional realities of the two jurisdictions while proposing a coherent, enforceable approach that aligns United Ulster with the best traditions of continuous local democracy and modern digital tools, adapted to the specific circumstances of the nine counties whose combined population is approximately 2.26 million.

End of Document — Discussion Paper and Policy Framework

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