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New Decade, New Approach

Press release

09 January 2020

The Tánaiste and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have published the text of a deal to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland.

The deal, entitled ***New Decade, New Approach*** has been tabled at talks at Stormont House for the political parties in Northern Ireland to agree. It will transform public services and restore public confidence in devolved government.

Agreement will see the full restoration of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement including the Executive, the Assembly and the North/South Ministerial Council with the Assembly and Executive meeting and formed. Accepting the deal would also bring about the parties' committed measures which will end ongoing industrial action immediately. This includes pay parity, a new action plan on waiting times and delivering much needed reforms on health and social care.

Reforms to the health service, education and justice will be prioritised by a new Executive, as well as important improvements in transparency and accountability, and in how civil servants, ministers and special advisers conduct themselves.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney TD, said:

“The Governments are today putting a proposed agreement to all the parties. This is based on the extensive discussions and collective work undertaken by the parties since May last year, following the awful murder of Lyra McKee. The Governments believe that it represents a fair and balanced package. There is no need, and no public patience, for more process and more discussions. It is time for political leadership and a collective commitment to making politics work for people”

Rt Hon Julian Smith MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said:

“I have written to the Speaker asking him to call the Assembly on Friday to enable the restoration of the Executive. This is a moment of truth for the Good Friday Agreement. It is a fair and balanced deal that will ensure key decisions about peoples’ lives can be made. It immediately ends the health strike, focuses on reforms to health and social care, ensures more sustainable institutions, better politics and greater transparency and a new framework on culture and language. I urge the parties to come together and get Stormont back up and running. It is entirely within their gift.”

Full text of **New Decade, New Approach**

The key elements of the draft agreement are:

Transforming Public Services and Investing in the Economy

- This deal focuses on delivering what matters to citizens in Northern Ireland: better public services, a stronger economy and a fairer society.
- A new Executive will address problems in the health service, reform the education and justice systems, grow the economy, promote opportunity and tackle deprivation.

Better Politics and Sustainable Institutions

- This deal is about making sure Northern Ireland never goes three years without an Executive again.
- The deal is also about giving the public and the parties confidence in politics and in the sustainability of the institutions. This deal is not just an Executive for its own sake - it offers real reform.
- There are important improvements in how civil servants, special advisers and ministers should conduct themselves to provide more transparent and accountable government in the wake of the RHI issue. This means better use of taxpayers’ money and better delivery of the services and policies that shape people’s lives.
- There will be more time in the event a First or deputy First Minister resigns to appoint a replacement before an election is required. And significantly more time after an election to form an Executive.
- Ministers will be able to remain in post, while an Executive is formed, and Assembly committees will continue to be able to scrutinise the work of the Executive.

Language and Identity

- The deal offers a new cultural framework that will include a new Office for Identity and Cultural Expression to promote cultural diversity and inclusion across all identities and cultures alongside a Commissioner to protect and enhance the Irish language and a further Commissioner to develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition in Northern Ireland.
- This will be made law through an integrated package of legislation that will establish new parts of the Northern Ireland Act.

Petition of Concern

- There will be meaningful reform of the petition of concern bringing it closer to its original role, as conceived of the Good Friday Agreement and as a means of building consensus. It will not be a veto for any one party.

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