

# Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill Introduced in Parliament

- The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill provides a short extension to the period for Executive formation.
- The Bill also enables the Secretary of State to amend MLA salaries while the Assembly is unable to conduct business.
- The legislation will also take limited but necessary steps to maintain the delivery of Northern Ireland's public services.

Following the Secretary of State's recent announcement in Parliament describing his intention to legislate to extend the period for Executive formation and cut MLA pay, the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill will be introduced in Parliament today (Monday 21 November).

The legislation will extend the period for Executive formation by six weeks to 8 December with the possibility of a further six week extension to 19 January, to allow the Northern Ireland Parties to come together and deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

Further, the Bill will clarify the limited decision-making powers to be provided to NI Civil Servants in the absence of Ministers, enable the Secretary of State to amend MLA salaries while the Assembly is unable to conduct business, and maintain public service delivery. The Bill will also enable a small number of vital public service appointments to be made and enable the regional rate for 2023/24 to be set should an Executive not be in place to do so.

Following discussions with the party leaders, community and business representatives across NI, the Secretary of State made the decision to introduce this legislation to allow for more time and space for Executive formation, avoiding an unwanted election.

Recognising public frustration that MLAs continue to draw a full salary while not performing the duties they were elected to do, this legislation will also enable the Secretary of State to amend the salaries and expenses payable to MLAs while the Assembly is not sitting. This measure is one of several in the Bill that will address the realities of the governance gap in NI during the present impasse.

Speaking ahead of the Bill's introduction, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris said:

I urge the Northern Ireland Parties to use this extended time to come together and deliver for the interests of all people in Northern Ireland, particularly in this time of rising costs.

At present, MLAs are not in a position to fulfil the full range of their duties, so it is right that we take steps to reduce their

salaries, especially in the current economic climate and in view of the £660 million black hole in the public finances created by poor decisions made by outgoing Ministers.

Furthermore, Northern Ireland's people are being denied full democratic representation. The government's priority is to see politicians elected to return to fulfil their roles in a strong, devolved and locally accountable government, as laid out by the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

#### Notes to editors:

- The 28 October deadline for Executive formation introduced through the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Act 2022 has passed. This legislation allowed 24 weeks for parties to form an Executive following the last Assembly election in May 2022. The new legislation introduced in today's Bill will extend this time period for Executive formation.
- Independent analysis provided during a previous political impasse recommended a 27.5% reduction in MLA salaries.