

# Secretary of State for NI, Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP – Statement

I believe strongly that people in Northern Ireland deserve locally-elected decision-makers who are working for them, to address the issues that matter most to people here.

As of earlier today, an Executive can no longer form and I am duty-bound by law to call new elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly as set out in the New Decade, New Approach agreement as soon as practicably possible and within 12 weeks.

Having spoken with the various Party leaders this week, I know no one in Northern Ireland is calling for an election – but nearly all Parties signed up to the Agreement that put us in this position only a couple of years ago.

Today I also met the Chief Electoral Officer to discuss operational considerations to inform my decision about the election date.

It was particularly disappointing to see yesterday that the Assembly was still unable to elect a Speaker, despite all the time that has passed.

At a time when so many are struggling with the cost of living and fearful of what is to come, I understand people's frustration that MLAs continue to draw a full salary when they are not performing all the duties they were elected to do.

So, I will be considering my options to act on MLA pay.

Right now, the Executive no longer has Ministers in post to act for the people of Northern Ireland.

That means no Ministers to deliver the public services you rely on. That means no Ministers to manage the budget pressures affecting the funding of your hospitals, your schools, your doctors and nurses.

So in the absence of an Executive I will take limited but necessary steps to protect public finances and the delivery of public services.

I have already met the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Jayne Brady, to discuss this and gather evidence on the state of Stormont's financial position. I shall hopefully receive more detailed information about this next week.

Then I'll soon outline our plan of action to make sure that the interests of the people of Northern Ireland are protected.

And to those who have called for "joint authority" of Northern Ireland in recent days, let me say this: this won't be considered. The UK Government is absolutely clear that the consent principle governs the constitutional

position of Northern Ireland. We will not support any arrangements that are inconsistent with that principle.