

The Speaker



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To: All Assembly Members

10 January 2020

Dear Member,

Correspondence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Following the statement from the two governments last night, you will be aware that the Secretary of State has written to me asking that I call a sitting of the Assembly today. I want to emphasise that no sitting has yet been arranged.

I know that all parties are keen to see an agreement and are seeking to assess the document published last night to reach their position on the detailed content of it. I will not be an impediment if it becomes clear that parties are ready to appoint Ministers. I will move quickly to call a sitting and in these circumstances it is possible that I may have to give Members less notice than I would normally seek to.

At this stage in a mandate when a Business Committee has yet to be appointed, the responsibility to call a plenary session remains one for the Speaker to exercise in consultation with the parties. The Secretary of State is fully aware of the long standing position I have had with the parties in relation to the circumstances in which I would call a further sitting of the Assembly. I repeated that position in a letter to whips last month and I now attach a copy of that letter along with my correspondence with the Secretary of State last night.

The whips were also informed that the Clerk/Chief Executive has ensured that preparations have been made to allow a sitting of the Assembly to be called before the deadline of 13 January 2020 under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. However, I will only call a sitting (unless 30 Members request one under Standing Order 11) if parties themselves contact me demonstrating that there is a clear indication that the business of electing a Speaker and Deputy Speakers and appointing Ministers can be completed successfully.

If such indication is received today or over the weekend, I will be in touch with whips and all Members as soon as possible to give notice of the sitting in the normal way. I will also

arrange a meeting of party whips and the smaller parties/independent representative to consult them on the precise business to be considered and then formally issue an Order Paper to all Members.

However, I am also mindful of previous discussions with parties and that calling a sitting prematurely before agreement is reached could be counter-productive to the goal of restoring the Assembly.

I will seek to be as helpful as possible but the speed and timing of any sitting depends entirely on when I hear positively from the parties.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Newton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

ROBIN NEWTON MBE MLA