

## 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**