

The Speaker



Room 39
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast, BT4 3XX

Tel: +44 (0) 28 9052 1130
Fax: +44 (0) 28 9052 1959
email: speaker@niassembly.gov.uk

Rt Hon Julian Smith MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont House
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SH

9 January 2020

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter tonight in relation to the continuing negotiations and arrangements for a sitting of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I appreciate the significant efforts that have been made by both governments and all parties to reach a much-needed agreement to enable us to have a sitting of the Assembly which can elect a new Speaker and appoint Ministers to allow key issues to be dealt with.

As the Clerk/ Chief Executive has reassured your officials over recent times, preparations have been made to allow a sitting of the Assembly to be called before the next deadline of 13 January 2020 under the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019.

However, the process of calling a sitting of the Assembly remains one for me to undertake in consultation with the parties. I have previously informed you in my letter of 27 November 2019, and again today, of the basis on which I would call a further plenary session.

The longstanding position from July 2017 based on the views of parties then, and repeated to the party whips again in correspondence from me last month, is that I would only proceed with the steps to formally summon Members to a further sitting if parties approach me to confirm that the election of a Speaker and the appointment of Ministers can be completed. I think that the sitting of 21 October 2019, which I had no discretion to call following receipt of a request from 30 Members, confirmed the previous view of parties that a sitting should only be held when agreement has been reached.

I welcome your notification this evening that you have published a deal which you believe provides a basis for restoring the Assembly. In line with the longstanding position, I now

await a reaction from the parties. If I receive communication from parties which indicates that they are ready to have a sitting, that a Speaker would be elected and that Ministers would be appointed, I will not be found wanting in moving quickly to call a sitting of the Assembly.

Parties are aware of and accustomed to this process. It therefore only requires parties to inform me that agreement has been reached and to request that I commence the process to call a sitting. If such communication is received, I will then notify Members of the sitting, arrange a meeting of party whips to consult them on the precise business to be considered and then formally issue an Order Paper to all Members.

The timing of any sitting therefore depends entirely on when I hear positively from the parties.

I am sharing a copy of our correspondence with the party whips.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ROBIN NEWTON" with a stylized flourish at the end.

ROBIN NEWTON MBE MLA