

An Ceann Comhairle

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The Speaker

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To: All Assembly Members

28 September 2022

Dear Member

You will be aware that the deadline for filling the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister expires on 28 October 2022, one month from today.

Under the terms of the relevant legislation, if a First Minister and deputy First Minister are not appointed by that point:

- Those Ministers who are currently in post cease to hold office;
- The offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister; and the other ministerial offices can no longer legally be filled;
- In line with Standing Order 45A(4)(b), the Opposition will be dissolved; and
- The Secretary of State is required, as soon as practicable, to propose a date for an Assembly election which must take place within 12 weeks

The intention of the relevant legislation and Standing Orders is that the Opposition is also dissolved at the time that Ministers cease to hold office. I will be giving this issue further detailed consideration in the time ahead.

Of course, before the Assembly is able to fill the offices of a First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Assembly must elect a new Speaker and Deputy Speakers.

As I have repeatedly made clear since the May election, if parties indicate to me that a new Speaker can be elected, I will make arrangements for the Assembly to meet at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the deadline can be met.

In the interim, I have also written to Ministers who continue to hold office to emphasise their ongoing duty in relation to the scrutiny of their responsibilities. While there are limited accountability mechanisms in these circumstances, it is important that Ministers use the procedural mechanisms which continue when the Assembly is not sitting. In particular, I have written to Ministers to remind them of the importance of both answering Assembly Written Questions within the deadlines in Standing Orders and using written statements to inform Members of important issues.

Members will be aware that I had not planned on still being in office at this point. While I am conscious of my responsibility to ensure that the remaining functions of the Speaker can still be exercised, I would prefer for a new Speaker to be elected as soon as possible.

It is not for me to take a position on the political issues behind our current situation but no-one will be surprised that the Speaker would want to see the Assembly functioning fully. I would therefore urge that the remaining time available is used to facilitate the resumption of normal Assembly business and the formation of an Executive.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alex Maskey". The signature is written in black ink and includes a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

ALEX MASKEY
SPEAKER