

Written Ministerial Statement

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The Executive Office

THE EXECUTIVE LEGISLATION PROGRAMME 2024

Ms O'Neill and Mrs Little-Pengelly (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Executive Committee has agreed a programme of legislation which, subject to its further agreement to the content of individual Bills, Ministers intend to introduce in the Assembly during the calendar year 2024.

While the Legislation Programme for 2024 is a more substantial one than normal for a single year, we wish to emphasise in presenting it to the Assembly that it includes only those measures which have been assessed as having reached a stage in their policy development to permit the introduction of legislation before the end of this year. It does not represent the totality of Ministers' legislative intentions for this mandate, as Ministers are also considering a wide range of other matters which will ultimately require legislation during the remainder of this mandate. The Legislation Programme will therefore be kept under review, and we will provide the Assembly with further statements at appropriate stages.

The Programme which we are presenting is a very challenging one, but we are aware that many of the measures it contains are overdue and are keenly awaited by those who will be affected by and benefit from them. We and the other Ministers in the Executive therefore look forward to working with the Assembly and its Committees to progress the delivery of this legislation efficiently and with due diligence.

It is our intention shortly to lay a motion to enable the Assembly to debate this Legislation Programme.

The Legislation Programme of Executive Bills for introduction in 2024 will consist of the following Bills.

The **Minister for Communities** is bringing forward four bills dealing with, respectively, defective premises, pensions, child support enforcement and sign language.

The **Defective Premises and Limitation Amendment Bill** was introduced into the Assembly on 20 May for process by Accelerated Passage. Its purpose is to align local legislation regarding limitation periods for defective buildings with other UK jurisdictions.

The **Pensions (Automatic Enrolment) Bill**, also introduced on 20 May, will extend the scope of the current automatic enrolment of jobholders into pension schemes by conferring regulation-making powers on the Department for Communities to change the current age limits and earnings limits.

The **Child Support Enforcement Bill** will make provision for the enforcement of child support maintenance and other maintenance to maintain parity with UK legislation.

To recognise, promote and protect both British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) the **Sign Language Bill** will guarantee access to services through BSL/ISL and ensure the right for BSL/ISL users to use, develop and preserve BSL/ISL and develop Deaf culture.

The **Minister for the Economy** will introduce legislation relating to her department's financial powers, to provide a new function for the Utility Regulator and to make provision for the RHI Scheme.

A **Financial Assistance Bill** will resolve issues in relation to some of the Department for the Economy's financial powers, including powers of financial assistance (which would among other

matters permit the department to use Financial Transactions Capital), provision of powers to exempt or remit certain fees in order to alleviate hardship, and the power to form companies. Subject to further consideration, these provisions may be included in a Financial Provisions Bill to be brought forward by the Minister of Finance.

The purpose of the **Utility Regulator Decarbonisation Powers Bill** will be to provide a new function for the Utility Regulator to enable it to support the Department for the Economy in the delivery of the Executive's Energy Strategy and targets under the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022.

An **RHI Scheme Bill** will make provision for the future of the scheme.

The **Minister of Finance** will introduce the normal **Budget Bills** as part of the annual financial cycle and a **Financial Provisions Bill** to reconcile several routine financial matters across departments. As noted earlier, this may include provisions which would otherwise form a separate Financial Assistance Bill by the Department for the Economy.

The Minister of Finance will also introduce a **Fiscal Council Bill** to establish the NI Fiscal Council on a permanent, statutory basis in order to bring greater transparency and independent scrutiny to the current and future state of Northern Ireland's public finances.

The **Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs'** legislative plans focus on dilapidated buildings and altering provisions relating to EU food legacy.

A **Dilapidation Bill** will confer functions on district councils to provide them with a modern, fit for purpose regime to tackle dilapidated / dangerous buildings and sites, including a series of notices, offences, penalties and appeals.

The purpose of the **Agriculture Bill** will be to provide powers to allow the department to transition from, substantially alter, or end the EU legacy Fruit and Vegetable Aid and EU Food Information and Promotions Schemes, as they apply to Northern Ireland.

The **Minister for Health** will introduce three bills on the modernisation of public health legislation, adult protection and hospital parking charges respectively.

The Public Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 is over 50 years old and needs to be updated in order to make it fit for purpose to better manage 21st century public health emergencies. A **Public Health Bill** will replace this Act and widen its scope.

The **Adult Protection Bill** is a response to the Commissioner for Older People's Home Truths Investigation into Dunmurry Manor Care Home, and the Certified Professional Environmental Auditor's (CPEA's) Independent Review into Safeguarding and Care at Dunmurry Manor. It will introduce additional protections to underpin and strengthen the adult protection process and align this with best practice in other jurisdictions.

The **Hospital Parking Charges Bill** was introduced in the Assembly on 15 April and progressed by accelerated passage to Final Stage on 7 May. Its purpose is to defer by two years the operational commencement date of the Hospital Parking Charges Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 for the purposes of developing a funding plan for the implementation of free parking at the end of the postponement.

The **Minister of Justice** plans to make legislative provision for several justice purposes, primarily relating to the retention of fingerprints and DNA profiles, and other provisions about child bail, remand and custody. A **Justice Bill** will additionally include other new provisions relating to the separation of children and adults in custody and various other matters.

The **Minister for Infrastructure** will introduce a **Water, Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Bill** to provide new and additional powers across seven areas of water, flooding and drainage legislation.

Finally, as **First Minister and deputy First Minister** we will introduce a Bill on **Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries & Workhouse Public Inquiry and Financial Redress**. Its purpose is to establish a Statutory Public Inquiry to investigate issues of individual, institutional, organisational

and state departmental/agent responsibility for human rights violations experienced in Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses between 1922 and 1995. It will further include provision for The Executive Office to establish a Redress Service to administer financial redress schemes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle O'Neill". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Michelle" and the last name "O'Neill" clearly distinguishable.

Michelle O'Neill MLA
First Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Emma Little-Pengelly". The signature is highly stylized and abstract, featuring several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Emma Little-Pengelly MLA
deputy First Minister