

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Department of Finance

CITY AND GROWTH DEALS: TREASURY PAUSE ON FUNDING COMMITMENTS

Published on Wednesday 18 September 2024

Dr Archibald (The Minister of Finance): I wish to update Members on the pause of British Government funding commitments regarding City and Growth Deals.

In my statement to the House on Monday 16 September I outlined the deplorable and short-sighted move by Treasury.

I advised Members that I was seeking an urgent meeting with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

That evening, I had a joint meeting with both with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State, who confirmed there was no change in approach to the Belfast Region City Deal and Derry City and Strabane District Council City Deal and that they could proceed as planned. This was welcome news.

However, it was then confirmed by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that the pause remained for the two Growth Deals, Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid South West. I made clear in the strongest possible terms that this is unacceptable and stressed that there should be no disparity between Deals.

I outlined the considerable time, effort, commitment and enthusiasm that has been invested in these Deals by councils, Deal partners, Project Promoters and Departments.

As well as the repercussions of this short-sighted decision and how it could undermine momentum and confidence of Deal partners and Project Promoters and risks undermining further investment from the private sector, a key objective of the Deals.

Having met with Growth Deal partners earlier that day, I was able to relay their very real concerns as well as their anger and frustration at the perception that the British Government was operating a two-tier system between cities and rural regions, the very opposite of regional balance. I put this point across strongly urging for a reconsideration.

The response I received was very disappointing.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said he was unable to reverse the pause on the Growth Deals. I reiterated that this remains an unacceptable situation.

I personally updated the Council Chief Executives of the two affected Deals on the morning of Tuesday 17 September. I reiterated the widespread support from this House. I reassured them that I will continue to keep the pressure on to ensure commitments to their Deals are fulfilled.

The City and Growth Deals are a key driver for economic growth and regional balance across the North. There are complementarities and benefits right across all council areas and regions. We need all four Deals, and we need the confidence and security to get on with delivering them for our people to stimulate local and regional economies for this place we call home.

I will continue to impress upon the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State that the British Government must honour the commitments and pledges made to all four City and Growth Deals. The current position is simply untenable.

It is essential that we are united in our message that this pause must be lifted immediately for the two Growth Deals.

I was pleased by the unanimous cross-party support during my debate in the Chamber on Monday.

This is reiterated in the Party Leader letter that issued last night reflecting our united voice to keep the pressure on the British Government.

These Deals and the additional investment that accompanies them will bring hope and prosperity right across the North, for our citizens, communities, businesses and future generations.

I urge Members to continue to make the case to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

This decision must be reversed.