

New Decade, New Approach



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Context and Responsibilities

1. The Rt Hon Julian Smith CBE MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and Simon Coveney TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, have published this text of a deal to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland.
2. The deal will transform public services and restore public confidence in devolved government and has been tabled at talks at Stormont House for the political parties in Northern Ireland to agree.
3. These talks were convened to restore the institutions created by the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and, particularly, to restore a functioning Northern Ireland Executive delivering for the people of Northern Ireland on a stable and sustainable basis.
4. The participants throughout these talks were the UK and Irish Governments, each participating in accordance with their respective responsibilities, and the five main Northern Ireland parties.
5. Over several months of discussions, all the issues were extensively explored with the opportunity for each participant to put forward proposals.

The New Decade, New Approach deal represents a fair and balanced basis upon which to restore the institutions. The commitments of each Government are attached here as annexes for the information of the participants and the public. They are the respective responsibility of each Government, and no agreement is asked or required from the parties for those commitments.

The New Decade, New Approach Deal

The following represents the deal which the UK Government and Irish Government are inviting the parties to endorse as a basis for restoring the Executive.

Part 1: Priorities of the Restored Executive

This section records the priorities that the parties would agree for an incoming Executive.

The parties have agreed on a way forward for a restored Executive to begin the urgent task of strengthening public services and to tackle immediate challenges in key areas such as growing the economy, health, education and housing. A restored Executive brings with it **urgently needed local political oversight and decision-making**. The Executive will bring positive changes in areas that impact greatly on people's lives such as the economy, overcrowded hospitals, struggling schools, housing stress, welfare concerns and mental health. There will be a **multi-year Programme for Government**, underpinned by a **multi-year budget and legislative programme**.

The parties have agreed that the immediate priorities for the restored Executive should be:

> **Transforming our health service** with a long-term funding strategy. The Executive will:

- **immediately settle the ongoing pay dispute;**
- **introduce a new action plan on waiting times; and**
- **deliver reforms on health and social care** as set out in the Bengoa, Delivering Together and Power to People reports.

No-one waiting over a year at 30 September 2019 for outpatient or inpatient assessment/treatment will still be on a waiting list by March 2021.

The Executive will reconfigure hospital provision to deliver better patient outcomes, more stable services and sustainable staffing. Improvements will be made in stroke, breast assessment, urgent and emergency care and day case elective care by the end of 2020.

The Executive will also **deliver an extra 900 nursing and midwifery undergraduate places** over three years.

The Executive will consider the scope for changing how waiting times are measured, to reflect the entire patient journey, from referral to treatment, with appropriate targets.

The Executive will publish a **Mental Health Action Plan** within 2 months; a Mental Health Strategy by December 2020; a successor strategy and action plan to the **Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2** within 3 months; and a **new strategy and implementation plan on cancer** by December 2020.

The Executive will build capacity in general practice through the ongoing **rollout of Multi Disciplinary teams to cover a further 100,000 patients** by March 2021.

The Executive will provide increased investment to **fully implement service improvements for palliative and end of life care** including enhancing the contribution of hospices; and to increase support for palliative perinatal care.

The Executive will provide **3 funded cycles of IVF treatment**.

The Executive will expand university provision at Magee in line with commitments made by the previous Executive, including through the establishment of a **Graduate Entry Medical School**.

> **Transforming other public services** particularly in education and justice.

The Executive will **urgently resolve the current teachers' industrial dispute**. It will also **address resourcing pressures in schools**, ensuring that every school has a sustainable core budget to deliver quality education.

The Executive will **establish an external, independent review of education provision**, with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils, and the prospects of moving towards a single education system.

To help build a shared and integrated society, the Executive will **support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together** in the classroom.

The Executive will establish an expert group to examine and propose an action plan to **address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background**, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys.

The Executive will **deliver a new special educational needs framework** to support young people with special needs to achieve their full potential.

The Executive will **increase police numbers to 7,500**. The Executive will deliver committal reform to help **speed up the criminal justice system**, benefiting victims and witnesses.

The Executive will also address:

- **the findings in recently published reports from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, and**

- **the report of Sir John Gillen on the handling of serious sexual offences cases,** and will deliver the necessary changes in case conduct and management.

There will be **further reform of the NI Civil Service.**

There will be a review of Arm's Length Bodies with a view to their rationalisation.

> **Investing for the future** to ensure Northern Ireland is equipped to harness opportunities and drive sustainable productivity, including opportunities for future trade as we leave the EU. The economic context has changed considerably in the past three years. **A top priority of the Executive will be to develop a regionally-balanced economy with opportunities for all.**

The Executive will invest strategically in ensuring that NI has the right mix of skills for a thriving economy.

To boost the economy, the Executive will **drive the delivery of essential infrastructure projects**, including York Street Interchange, in order to build a Northern Ireland that is equipped for a prosperous shared future.

The Executive will make it a priority to realise the economic potential offered by City Deals for the Belfast Region and Derry/Londonderry, including through **match capital funding for infrastructure, regeneration and tourism projects**. The Executive will work with the UK Government to develop and deliver the Growth Deals for Mid South West Northern Ireland and Causeway Coast and Glens.

The Executive will **invest urgently in wastewater infrastructure** which is at or nearing capacity in many places across Northern Ireland, including in Belfast, limiting growth.

The Executive will **bring more big events like The Open Championship to Northern Ireland** - playing to our strengths and boosting our economy. The Executive will also take forward the **reform of licensing laws**.

The Executive will advance with plans to **complete both the Regional and Sub Regional Stadia Programmes, including Casement Park.**

The Executive will **tackle climate change head on** with a strategy to **address the immediate and longer term impacts of climate change.**

The Executive will **introduce legislation and targets for reducing carbon emissions** in line with the Paris Climate Change Accord.

In support of both economic and educational objectives, the Executive will **develop an enhanced approach to careers advice, curriculum, training and apprenticeships** to enhance employability and support economic growth.

> **Delivering a fair and compassionate society** that supports working families and the most vulnerable. The Executive will develop and implement an **Anti-poverty Strategy**.

The parties reaffirm their commitment to **tackling paramilitarism**. Ending the harm done by paramilitarism will be a priority in the new Programme for Government.

There will be a focus within the Programme for Government on **ending sectarianism** and robust supporting strategies and actions will be put in place.

By introducing legislation to reclassify housing associations, **the Executive will enable housing associations to continue building new social housing and intermediate housing**, including the Co-ownership Housing Scheme after March 2020. Housing will be included as a specific priority in the Programme for Government. The Executive will also **enhance investment and agree a target for new social and affordable home starts** and tackle the maintenance backlog for Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties.

The Executive will examine options to **remove historical debt** from the NI Housing Executive and **exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax**, and set a **long-term trajectory for the rental charges** for NI Housing Executive homes which is sustainable and is affordable to tenants.

The Executive will **extend existing welfare mitigation measures** beyond March 2020, when they are currently due to expire.

The Executive will press on with implementation of a **redress scheme for victims and survivors of historical abuse**, making payments as early as possible.

The Executive will **publish a Childcare Strategy** and identify resources to deliver extended, affordable and high quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4.

The loss of a child causes unimaginable pain for families. The Executive will **establish a child funeral fund**, to ease the burden on families suffering acutely.

The Executive will bring about **parity in financial support to victims** of contaminated blood in Northern Ireland with those in England.

> **Developing a new Programme for Government**

People and communities will have an opportunity to shape the future Programme for Government and the budget, through citizen engagement and co-design.

The NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan will provide the basis for an Executive work programme of priority actions to be taken in the coming months. The parties recognise that there are a great many challenges facing the restored Executive that will only be addressed in the medium to long term. To address these, the parties are committed to working together immediately to put in place an ambitious Programme for Government firmly focussed on improving prosperity and wellbeing for all. This will reflect new ways of working that ensure the Executive is transparently and collectively accountable to the Assembly and to citizens.

Part 2: Northern Ireland Executive Formation Agreement

This section represents the deal that the Parties would agree to restore the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement Institutions.

A new approach to government in Northern Ireland

1. This agreement marks a new approach to government in Northern Ireland. **It enables the restoration to full operation of all the institutions of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement**, including the Executive, the Assembly, the North South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. It contains a range of specific proposals to make government better, from changes to the ministerial code through to a new approach to the Petition of Concern. It also contains a commitment to further reform to take account of the outcome of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) inquiry.
2. This agreement represents a renewed effort by Northern Ireland's political parties to implement the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and, in signing it, the parties commit with renewed vigour to governing in the best interests of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Transparency, accountability and the functioning of the Executive

3. Ministers and civil servants, including special advisers, each have a part to play in **rebuilding the trust of citizens** in the operation of a future administration. The parties reaffirm their commitment to greater transparency and improved governance arrangements that are aimed at securing and maintaining public confidence. This is particularly important in light of the public inquiry into the RHI scheme.
4. The parties have therefore agreed to an **ambitious package of measures to strengthen transparency and governance arrangements** in the Assembly and Executive in line with international best practice. The Executive will, as a matter of urgency, produce strengthened drafts of the ministerial, civil service and special adviser codes, to be implemented immediately.
5. The measures agreed here include:

- a. making clear the **accountability of Ministers** to the Assembly;
 - b. strengthening **Ministers' responsibility for their special advisers**;
 - c. publishing details of **Ministers' meetings** with external organisations;
 - d. publishing details of **gifts and hospitality received by special advisers**, meetings with external organisations, and pay;
 - e. strengthening requirements for **record-keeping** and the **protections for whistleblowers**;
 - f. establishment of a **fiscal council** which would assess and report on the sustainability of the Executive's finances and spending proposals.
6. The parties also agree to establish a **robust, independent enforcement mechanism** to deal with breaches of the Ministerial Code and related documents.
 7. The Executive will establish a dedicated sub-committee which will consider the findings of the RHI inquiry and propose further reforms, in addition to those in this agreement, to deliver the changes necessary to rebuild public confidence. The parties agree to deliver any such reforms rapidly once the inquiry has reported.
 8. The full detail of these transparency and accountability measures is set out in **Annex A**.

Petition of Concern

9. The parties have agreed that the use of the **Petition of Concern should be reduced, and returned to its intended purpose**. The parties will publicly commit to tabling or supporting Petitions of Concern only in the most **exceptional circumstances and as a last resort**, having used every other available mechanism.
10. The parties agree to a number of specific changes to how the Petition of Concern will work for the remaining mandate of this Assembly and into the future as detailed in **Annex B**. This will include measures so that a Petition of Concern will not be available where the question before the Assembly relates to a member's conduct as a Minister or MLA and that, in respect of both Executive and Private Members' Bills, the Petition of Concern will apply only after Second Stage. These changes will be given effect in Standing Orders or amendments to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as appropriate, at the earliest opportunity.
11. Most parties supported wider reform of the Petition of Concern. This mechanism is an important part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement safeguards to ensure that

all sections of the community can participate and work together successfully in the operation of the institutions established under the Agreement, and that all sections of the community are protected.

12. The threshold for a Petition of Concern shall remain at 30 MLAs, but a Petition can only be triggered by members from two or more parties. For this purpose, an independent Member is to be treated as a party if that Member was elected on an independent platform.
13. A valid Petition of Concern shall trigger a 14-day period of consideration. After this consideration, if 30 MLAs confirm support for the Petition of Concern, the Assembly can determine the matter in accordance with the cross community consent procedure.

Sustainability of the Institutions

14. The parties agree that a three-year absence of devolved government cannot happen again, and have therefore agreed a package of measures to deliver **more sustainable institutions that are more resilient** and able to continue to function throughout periods of political difficulty.
15. The parties have agreed that the institutions should be reformed on the basis of **good faith, trust, and mutual respect**, and have reaffirmed their **commitment to the principles of power-sharing and cross community protection** contained in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.
16. This agreement creates new bodies, including a **Party Leaders' Forum** and **Executive Sub-Committee on Brexit** to improve collaboration and partnership and improve the sustainability of the institutions. It makes arrangements to **strengthen the ability of the parties in Opposition to hold the Executive to account**, including proposals to extend the period of time in which parties can form an Opposition.
17. The parties also agree to introduce reformed measures to **put civic engagement and public consultation at the heart of policy-making**, recognising the vital role that wider society plays in supporting effective and accountable Government.
18. If a period of political tension arises in future which risks a breakdown of the institutions the agreement provides for a longer **24-week period before an Assembly election must be called**. During this period **Ministers will remain in office in a care-taker capacity** to allow for greater continuity of decision-making. Ministers will be required to act within well-defined limits, including as set out in the Ministerial Code and in accordance with the requirement for an Executive Committee to consider any decisions that are significant and controversial or

cross-cutting, and, as appropriate, the restrictions that are in place during a pre-election period. **Assembly Committees will also continue to function** and discharge their important duties.

Programme for Government

19. The parties have agreed the need for a **shared and ambitious strategic vision** for the future, with the aim of **improving lives across Northern Ireland**. That approach must be reflected in an outcomes-based Programme for Government, building on the outcomes from the previous Programme for Government. It must also be a **sustainable basis** upon which the parties in the Executive can **work in partnership**.
20. The parties reaffirm their commitment to the **Declaration of Support contained in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and successor agreements**. In doing so, they recognise that the Programme for Government must provide a sustainable basis for the Executive to work together in partnership to serve and deliver for all on the basis of demonstrable and objectively measured need. Reconciliation will be central to the Executive's approach, and there will be a focus on building a united community in a way that has equality and mutual respect to the fore.
21. In addition, the parties agree that the principles and practice of citizen and community engagement and co-design will be a key part of the development and delivery of the Programme for Government and its supporting strategies.
22. The parties have agreed a two-stage approach to establishing a strategic level Programme for Government comprising the **framework of 12 outcomes of societal wellbeing** from the Northern Ireland Civil Service Outcomes Delivery Plan and a **Priorities Plan** consisting of actions for delivery during the remainder of 2019/20.
23. By April 2020, informed by a detailed stakeholder engagement process, the Executive will publish a **new strategic level outcomes-based Programme for Government** aligned to a multi-year budget with a sustained approach to public finances and prioritised investment in infrastructure and public services. The new Programme will be aimed at delivering lasting changes and improvements in key priority areas and will include measures aimed at: removing paramilitarism, ending sectarianism, transforming health and social care, reforming education, ensuring households have access to good quality, affordable and sustainable homes, addressing climate change, creating good jobs and protecting workers' rights.
24. In moving to a better, more prosperous and shared future the parties recognise the need to **address the legacy of the past**. To that end, the parties are committed to

working together and to doing everything possible to heal wounds and eliminate the issues that divide us.

Rights, language and identity

25. The parties affirm the need to **respect the freedom of all persons in Northern Ireland to choose, affirm, maintain and develop their national and cultural identity** and to celebrate and express that identity in a manner which takes into account the sensitivities of those with different national or cultural identities and respects the rule of law. They also affirm the need to **encourage and promote reconciliation, tolerance and meaningful dialogue** between those of different national and cultural identities in Northern Ireland with a view to promoting **parity of esteem, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation**. These principles will be reflected in legislation.
26. The First Minister and deputy First Minister, supported by Junior Ministers in The Executive Office, will sponsor and oversee a new framework both recognising and celebrating Northern Ireland's diversity of identities and culture, and accommodating cultural difference.
27. The framework will be underpinned by an affirmation of the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, while acknowledging and accommodating those within our community who define themselves as 'other' and those who form our ethnic and newcomer communities. It will comprise:
 - a. An Office of Identity and Cultural Expression to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, build social cohesion and reconciliation and to celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland's rich cultural and linguistic heritage.
 - b. Legislation to create a Commissioner to recognise, support, protect and enhance the development of the Irish language in Northern Ireland and to provide official recognition of the status of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. The legislation will also repeal the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737.
 - c. Legislation to create a further such Commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition and to provide official recognition of the status of the Ulster Scots language in Northern Ireland. The legislation will also place a legal

duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate the use of Ulster Scots in the education system.

- d. The main function of the Irish Language Commissioner will be to protect and enhance the development of the use of the Irish language by public authorities including by providing advice and guidance, and introducing, supporting and monitoring the use of best practice language standards.
 - e. The main function of the further such Commissioner will be to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots/ Ulster British tradition in Northern Ireland.
 - f. A central Translation Hub will also be established in the Department of Finance within three months of an agreement, in order to provide language translation services for the 9 Executive Departments, Arm's Length Bodies, Local Government and Public Bodies.
 - g. The Assembly's Standing Orders will also be amended to allow any person to conduct their business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee through Irish or Ulster Scots. A simultaneous translation system will be made available in the Assembly to ensure that a person without Irish or Ulster Scots is not placed at a disadvantage.
 - h. This legislation - including establishing the Office and both Commissioners - will be established as new dedicated parts of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This is the legislation which implements the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and subsequent agreements and establishes the Assembly and Executive in law. The enactment of these new Parts of the Northern Ireland Act will reflect the importance of these issues to people and society in Northern Ireland.
 - i. The Office of Identity will provide funding streams and schemes, including publishing and broadcasting, small grants, events and tourism, exhibition and museum curation, built heritage, cultural education and tourism projects.
28. An Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee will be established to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights that is faithful to the stated intention of the 1998 Agreement in that it contains rights supplementary to those contained in the European Convention on Human Rights (which are currently applicable) and "that reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland"; as well as reflecting the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem.
29. The full details of the agreement in respect of rights, language and identity are set out in **Annex E**.

1. **Annex A: Transparency, accountability and the functioning of the Executive**

- 1.1. The parties have agreed the following measures. The Executive will, as a matter of urgency, produce strengthened drafts of the relevant codes to be implemented immediately.
 - 1.1.1. Making clear the accountability of Ministers to the Assembly and the need for statutory committees to be provided with the information they require to allow them to discharge their role.
 - 1.1.2. Strengthening the requirements for the declaration and handling of interests by Ministers with full declaration of interests on appointment to be regularly updated and for relevant interests to be published.
 - 1.1.3. Ministers to be responsible for the management, conduct and discipline of their special advisers (to also be included in the Special Adviser Code of Conduct).
 - 1.1.4. Enforcement of the Ministerial Code (and other codes) is key to making the Executive more accountable and transparent (options for a process to achieve this is the subject of a separate paper).
 - 1.1.5. Make clear the need for the recording of ministerial meetings (to also be included in the Civil Service Code), the attendance of officials at ministerial meetings, and the prompt declaration to the Department of any substantive discussions with external organisations relating to departmental business at which no officials were present.
 - 1.1.6. Publish details of meetings with external organisations (and also gifts and hospitality received).
 - 1.1.7. Special Adviser Code to include an overarching introduction making clear the critical role special advisers have in supporting Ministers and that they are an important part of the team working closely alongside civil servants to deliver Ministers' priorities.
 - 1.1.8. Making clear that Ministers are responsible for the management, conduct and discipline of their special advisers (and that this requirement will be incorporated in the Ministerial Code).

- 1.1.9. Incorporating any changes agreed to the Civil Service Code in the Special Adviser Code.
 - 1.1.10. Publishing details of gifts and hospitality received by special advisers, meetings with external organisations, and pay.
 - 1.1.11. Include the requirement that while individual civil servants are accountable to their department's Minister, the civil service also has a wider obligation to the Executive as a whole.
 - 1.1.12. Include an explicit requirement to maintain accurate records, and that information should be handled as openly and transparently as possible within the legal framework.
 - 1.1.13. Make clear that within the civil service there is zero tolerance of harassment, bullying or inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour and that action should be taken to ensure there is a culture where people can speak up about unacceptable behaviour.
 - 1.1.14. Strengthening the rules and awareness around whistleblowing / speaking up so that proper consideration is given to both internal and external complaints.
- 1.2. In addition, the parties agree that Ministers are obliged to abide by the provisions of Guidance to Ministers on the Exercise of their Functions and Conduct of Executive Business.
 - 1.3. Anyone may make a complaint regarding alleged breaches of ministerial standards or the Ministerial Code. Complaints will only be considered if the complainant provides their name, contact details and sufficient details of the alleged breach to be able to give it full consideration.
 - 1.4. Complaints that a Minister has breached the Ministerial Code of Conduct, Guidance to Ministers on the Exercise of their Functions or Conduct of Executive Business will be referred to the Commissioners for Ministerial Standards.
 - 1.5. The Commissioners will decide whether a complaint has sufficient merit to be considered, and will decline to investigate a complaint that is frivolous, vexatious, or made in bad faith.

- 1.6. The Commissioners will number three in addition to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, and will be appointed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- 1.7. The Commissioners may ask for the facts from the Secretary to the Executive to inform their decision as to whether to investigate a complaint.
- 1.8. The Commissioners' decision to investigate or not to investigate, and the grounds for their decision, will be published. There will be strict, published, timeframes to adhere to for each stage of the process.
- 1.9. When the Commissioners investigate a complaint, they will publish the findings of their investigation. Their findings will include whether or not the Minister has been found to have breached the terms of the Code or Guidance, and the relative seriousness of the breach. The findings will not include any recommendation regarding sanctions. This will ultimately be a matter for the relevant Party/Assembly process.
- 1.10. The published report of the Commissioners may provide the grounds upon which others may initiate their own sanctions, including those under s.30 of the NI Act 1998 by which the Assembly can suspend a Minister on the passing of a motion of no confidence supported by 30 MLAs or moved by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. The published report may also be taken into consideration by the nominating officer of the Minister's party.
- 1.11. All Ministers and civil servants, including special advisers, will cooperate fully with any investigation by the Commissioners for Ministerial Standards.
- 1.12. The Assembly Committee on Standards and Privileges will be enhanced by the appointment of 3 independent lay members with voting rights.
- 1.13. The Executive will as a matter of priority take forward reviews of civil service reform, including procurement and appointment processes, public appointments and arm's length bodies.

2. **Annex B: Petition of Concern**

- 2.1. The parties have agreed that the use of the Petition of Concern should be reduced, and returned to its intended purpose. Alongside agreeing the specific changes below, the parties commit to tabling or supporting Petitions of Concern only in the most exceptional circumstances and as a last resort, having used every other available mechanism. In particular, the First Minister and deputy First Minister will commit not to sign a Petition of Concern in this Assembly mandate.
- 2.2. In addition, the parties agree to the following changes, which will be given effect in Standing Orders or legislation, as appropriate, at the earliest opportunity:
 - 2.2.1. A Petition must be accompanied by a statement of the grounds and rationale upon which it is being tabled and be signed in person at the Bills Office.
 - 2.2.2. The Speaker and the three Deputy Speakers shall not sign a Petition.
 - 2.2.3. The threshold for a Petition of Concern will remain at 30 MLAs, but a Petition can only be triggered by members from two or more parties. For this purpose, an independent Member is to be treated as a party if that Member was elected on an independent platform.
 - 2.2.4. The Petition of Concern will not be available for standards motions under Standing Order 69B, or motions and questions which have no express legal or procedural effect.
 - 2.2.5. In respect of both Executive and Private Members' Bills, the Petition of Concern will apply only after Second Stage.
 - 2.2.6. Ministers and Junior Ministers should not be excluded from signing a Petition, but the parties note that for a Minister or Junior Minister to sign a Petition in respect of a matter that is in accordance with a decision of the Executive would be a breach of the Pledge of Office paragraph (f).
 - 2.2.7. A valid Petition of Concern shall trigger a 14-day period of consideration, including on any reports on whether a measure or proposal for legislation is in conformity with equality requirements, including the ECHR/ Bill of Rights and any advice following on from Assembly Standing Order 30(6) and 85(4). After this consideration, if

30 MLAs confirm support for the Petition of Concern, the Assembly can determine the matter in accordance with the cross community consent procedure.

- 2.3. The provisions of section 13(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and of Order 60 of Assembly Standing Orders relating to the referral of Bills to the Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements should continue to apply.

3. **Annex C: Sustainability of the Institutions**

- 3.1. The parties have reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of power-sharing and cross community protection contained in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

Executive Business

- 3.2. The parties have agreed to return to the institutions on the basis of good faith, mutual respect and trust - underpinned by strong working relationships. The Parties have agreed that effective measures are needed to improve the sustainability of the institutions, to increase public confidence and increase the resilience of the institutions so that they can better withstand political difficulties, challenges and disagreements.
- 3.3. The parties have agreed to adopt a new and strengthened Conduct of Executive Business document. Consistent with the principles and procedures included in the transparency section of this Agreement, breaches of the document will be effectively and proportionately enforced.

Party Leaders' Forum

- 3.4. A Party Leaders' forum will be established. The forum will be attended by the leaders, or their 'permanent' nominated representative, of the political parties in the Executive. To ensure reasonable continuity of membership, parties will also nominate 'a deputy representative' who will attend when the 'permanent' representative is unable to attend. The forum will meet, as a minimum, once a month. It will be an informal forum that has no Executive decision-making authority. The forum will operate as a safe space for party leaders to discuss ongoing issues and provide early warning of any issues which might cause future political tension and disagreements. The value of the forum will be reviewed by forum members after 6 months.

Brexit

- 3.5. As a minimum, the Executive will establish a Brexit sub-committee. The sub-committee will be chaired by the First Minister and deputy First Minister (or their nominated Ministerial representatives). The sub-committee will have at least one representative from each party on the Executive. As a matter of urgency the sub-committee will consider Brexit-related issues and will initiate, as soon as is practicable, an assessment of the impact of Brexit on the

institutions and North/South and East/West relationships. The work of the sub-committee should be scrutinised by an Assembly Committee.

Opposition

- 3.6. The Parties have agreed to amend the Assembly Executive and Reform (Assembly Opposition) Act (NI) to provide that a party can enter the Official Opposition under the Act up to two years following the formation of the Executive. The parties have agreed that standing orders should be made to give effect to this within 3 months of the Assembly being reformed.
- 3.7. The parties recognise that additional funding should be made available to parties who form the Opposition. In the context of the agreed programme of measures to enhance the sustainability of the institutions, the relevant Assembly authorities should also commission a review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition as set out in the Fresh Start Agreement. An appropriate independent person should be appointed to conduct such a review, and the review should have regard to relevant comparators. This review should be submitted to the relevant Assembly authorities within 6 months of the first meeting of the Assembly. If further resources are deemed appropriate the Assembly Commission should seek additional resources. The review should recommend increased allowances for Opposition parties and should explore the creation of additional funding for the Offices of the Leaders of Opposition parties.

Structured Civic Engagement

- 3.8. The parties recognise the value of structured and flexible engagement with civic society to assist the Government to solve complex policy issues. The Parties have agreed that the existing Compact Civic Advisory Panel should be reformed to include a renewed membership appointed within 6 months by way of a Public Appointments process.
- 3.9. The Parties have agreed that about 1-2 issues will be commissioned per year for civic engagement. The Panel will be invited to propose the most appropriate model of engagement for specific issues, including one Citizens' Assembly a year. The issues will be identified by the Executive. Following consideration of the assigned issues recommendations will be made to the Executive by the Panel.

Appointment of FM/dFM & Providing continuity of decision making

- 3.10. The UK Government shall legislate to amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to extend the time for the appointment of a First Minister and a deputy First Minister after the resignation of a First Minister or deputy First Minister or after the first meeting of the Assembly following an Assembly election from 7 and 14 days respectively to 6 weeks in each case.
- 3.11. If no First Minister / deputy First Minister appointment has been made within 6 weeks of a resignation of First Minister / deputy First Minister or by the first meeting of the Assembly after an election, and the Assembly has not passed a resolution to dissolve itself under section 32 of the Northern Ireland Act, the parties will have a maximum further 18 weeks to appoint a First Minister / deputy First Minister. During this period the parties will continue to make concerted and determined efforts to agree on the appointment of a First Minister and deputy First Minister and form an Executive. To facilitate this, the Assembly shall meet regularly and at least every six weeks to consider progress. At any time, and in accordance with existing procedures, the Assembly could consider a motion to dissolve itself and call on the Secretary of State to propose a date for an election. However, if no appointment is made by the end of this period then the Secretary of State shall be under a duty to propose a date for an Assembly election as soon as is practicable and in any event for a date which is no later than 12 weeks of the duty arising.
- 3.12. Provision will also be made for Northern Ireland Executive Ministers to remain in office beyond the day of the poll to allow for greater continuity of decision making, until such a time as d'Hondt is run for all Ministerial offices or for a maximum period of 24 weeks beyond the day of the poll, or a maximum of 48 weeks since there has been a functioning Executive in place, whichever is the shorter.
- 3.13. Ministers remaining in office will be required to act at all times within well-defined limits. This is to include the requirement to act in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the requirement for an Executive Committee to consider any decisions that are significant and controversial or cross-cutting and, as appropriate, the restrictions that are in place during a pre-election period. In the absence of a functioning Executive Committee, Ministers will consequently not be able to take decisions which are significant or controversial.

- 3.14. In the case of a First Minister/deputy First Minister resignation, the Assembly and its Committees will continue to exercise their responsibilities until the Assembly is dissolved.
- 3.15. These changes will be given legislative effect consistent with the shared commitment to the principles of power-sharing and cross-community protection contained in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and ensuring there is sufficient representation to command cross-community confidence in the Assembly.

4. **Annex D: Programme for Government**

The following text, alongside its two annexes, represents a possible outline of a Programme for Government. The parties agree to publish, within two weeks of the restoration of the institutions, the fuller details of an agreed Programme for Government. The parties recognise that the final Programme for Government will need to be agreed by the parties who form the Executive.

- 4.1. The parties have agreed an approach to the Programme for Government that will set a **shared and ambitious strategic vision** for the future with the aim of improving wellbeing for all – by **tackling disadvantage** and **driving economic growth** on the basis of objective need.
- 4.2. The parties' agreed approach is to build on the outcomes in the previous Programme for Government, adding a new focus on the priorities of: **housing; education; childcare; infrastructure and services, climate change; ending sectarianism; and tackling paramilitarism.**
- 4.3. The parties reaffirm their commitment to the **Declaration of Support contained in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and successor agreements.** In doing so, they recognise that the Programme for Government must provide a sustainable basis for the Executive to work together in partnership to serve and deliver for all on the basis of demonstrable and objectively measured need. Reconciliation will be central to the Executive's approach, and there will be a focus on building a united community in a way that has equality and mutual respect to the fore.
- 4.4. The parties acknowledge the importance of **promoting and protecting the rights and identity of individuals** and are agreed that the Executive should seek to build a society that reflects the best international standards of human rights. The parties acknowledge the importance of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, whose remit is to ensure that government and other public bodies protect the human rights of everyone and help people understand what their rights are and what they can do if they are infringed.
- 4.5. In addition, the parties agree that the principles and practice of **citizen and community engagement and co-design** will be a key part of the development and delivery of the Programme for Government and its supporting strategies. This will empower citizens to secure their own rights

and wellbeing. This will complement – not replace – the right of citizens to challenge through the courts any denial of their lawful rights.

4.6. The Programme for Government will reflect the following principles.

4.6.1. The outcomes-based approach remains the best way to secure sustained improvement in wellbeing and economic growth.

4.6.2. The Programme for Government could be underpinned by key supporting strategies, including the following:

4.6.2.1. Anti-poverty strategy;

4.6.2.2. Economic/Industrial Strategy;

4.6.2.3. Investment Strategy;

4.6.2.4. Energy Strategy;

4.6.2.5. Racial Equality Strategy;

4.6.2.6. Disability Strategy;

4.6.2.7. Gender Strategy;

4.6.2.8. Sexual Orientation Strategy;

4.6.2.9. Active Ageing Strategy;

4.6.2.10. Children and Young People's Strategy;

4.6.2.11. Childcare Strategy;

4.6.2.12. Child Poverty Strategy;

4.6.2.13. Irish Language Strategy; and,

4.6.2.14. Ulster Scots Strategy.

4.6.3. This list is not exhaustive. The parties agree that, within 3 months, a new Executive will publish a comprehensive timetable for the development and delivery of these and other strategies necessary to achieve the outcomes in the Programme for Government.

4.6.4. Investment will be delivered at regional and sub-regional level on the basis of objective need in order to drive inclusive growth.

- 4.6.5. The Programme for Government must be underpinned by a multi-year budget, with a sustainable approach to public finances and prioritised investment in infrastructure and public services. There must be greater transparency, giving people clear information on what will be delivered with taxpayers' and ratepayers' money, and, where the Executive is seeking to raise additional revenue, it must be made clear what service improvements and investments will be funded with the additional money.
- 4.6.6. The parties acknowledge that a significant challenge arises in seeking to tackle the financial burden associated with delivering public services in a divided society. They are agreed that, in developing new policies and, over time, in reviewing existing ones, it will be important that the Executive takes steps to eliminate all such costs. The parties also acknowledge that a significant challenge arises in the delivery of public services with the resource element of the Block grant having been reduced in real terms over the last 10 years.
- 4.6.7. Short-term budgeting will end. Investment will be based on objective need, maximising impact, delivery of best value for money (encompassing all costs and benefits) and affordability, with priority given to the transformation of key services in health, education, housing, and justice.
- 4.6.8. An immediate and significant challenge facing the Executive is in relation to dealing with the impact of Brexit. In recognising the potential for widespread and significant implications across all aspects of social and economic life, the parties are agreed that the first priority for the Executive must be to ensure the best possible outcome for citizens and the economy, reflecting the priorities set out in the letter of August 2016 from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the Prime Minister.
- 4.6.9. Existing programmes and priorities will be continuously evaluated to identify their impact on outcomes. Those which are no longer relevant or which are not delivering the desired results will be amended or stopped.

- 4.6.10. Engagement with civic society and the principles of co-design and co-production must underpin the development of the Programme for Government, budget and strategies¹.
- 4.6.11. The parties agree that an Assembly Committee should be established to monitor progress against each of the Programme for Government outcomes and to consider potential measures for achieving improvement. A dedicated Programme for Government monitoring and reporting website will be developed which will allow for full and transparent public reporting.
- 4.6.12. Within its first month of operation, the Executive will publish a legislative programme and indicative timescales which will complement the Programme for Government.
- 4.7. The parties acknowledge that it will take time to address economic and societal challenges that have been present for decades, and they recognise the need to focus on long-term interventions that can bring about real change. In the absence of a functioning Executive, there has been a loss of momentum in public policy which will require a determined effort over many years to raise standards of public service to the levels that will be needed to support the parties' vision of societal wellbeing.
- 4.8. Against that background, the parties have agreed a parallel approach to the Programme for Government that will allow a cross-party Executive to quickly put in place actions to tackle immediate priority issues in a Year 1 work programme while at the same time beginning development of a strategic level programme of the type and scale needed to deliver lasting changes and improvements at a societal level.
- 4.9. The parties have agreed that the outcomes framework from the Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018/19 provides the only realistic basis for the initial (Year 1) Programme, but they also agree that work needs to begin immediately to develop a strategic Programme for 2020 and beyond.
- 4.10. The Year 1 Programme for Government will include the actions and programmes contained in Appendix 1 and will be agreed at the first meeting of the Executive and brought forward for Assembly consideration before the summer recess.
- 4.11. The parties have also identified the longer-term priorities contained in Appendix 2 as essential components for the future strategic level

¹ As set out in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9.

Programme. The new Programme and its key supporting strategies (Anti-poverty strategy, Industrial/Economic strategy and Investment strategy) will be underpinned by a budget and be ready for Executive sign-off and endorsement by the end of March 2020.

5. **Annex E: Rights, language and identity**

- 5.1. The First Minister and deputy First Minister, supported by Junior Ministers in The Executive Office, will sponsor and oversee a new framework both recognising and celebrating Northern Ireland's diversity of identities and culture and accommodating cultural difference. This framework will be underpinned by the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, while fully acknowledging and accommodating those within our community who define themselves as 'other', and those from our ethnic communities and newcomer communities.
- 5.2. The guiding principles of this framework will be set out in legislation, and public authorities must in exercising their functions have due regard to the principles, namely:
 - 5.2.1. the need to respect the freedom of all persons in Northern Ireland to choose, affirm, maintain and develop their national and cultural identity and to celebrate and express that identity in a manner which takes into account the sensitivities of those with different national or cultural identities and respects the rule of law;
 - 5.2.2. the need to encourage and promote reconciliation, tolerance and meaningful dialogue between those of different national and cultural identities in Northern Ireland with a view to promoting parity of esteem, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. **The Office of Identity and Cultural Expression** (the 'Office') provides the central point for giving effect to these principles and promoting this framework.
- 5.3. The strategic aims of the Office will be:
 - 5.3.1. to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, including Northern Ireland's ethnic, national, linguistic and faith communities;
 - 5.3.2. build social cohesion and reconciliation so that everyone has a sense of belonging;
 - 5.3.3. build capacity and resilience on how we address our unresolved cultural identity issues; and

- 5.3.4. celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland's rich cultural and linguistic heritage, recognising the equal validity and importance of all identities and traditions.
- 5.4. The Office will be established as a statutory body, to which the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, will appoint a Director.
- 5.5. In giving effect to the guiding principles the Office will undertake the following functions:
 - 5.5.1. provide guidance to public authorities;
 - 5.5.2. monitor compliance with the duty to have due regard to the principles;
 - 5.5.3. report to the Assembly on compliance;
 - 5.5.4. promote examples of best practice;
 - 5.5.5. commission and publish research and reports in respect of cultural traditions and identities;
 - 5.5.6. in response to requests from either Commissioner, on issues of a challenging nature, undertake independent research, reach balanced findings and make recommendations on matters of concern;
 - 5.5.7. promote public awareness and educational programmes, including guidance on how the rights of a child to learn about their identity and heritage, as well as those of other traditions, will be incorporated into the education sector;
 - 5.5.8. periodically audit public authorities on how they have respected and accommodated the cultural expression of minorities within their area of responsibility;
 - 5.5.9. provide grant aid (capital and revenue) to projects and programmes consistent with its aims set out in paragraph 5.3. The Office will have funding streams and schemes including publishing and broadcasting, small grants, events and tourism, exhibition and museum curation, built heritage, cultural education and tourism projects;
 - 5.5.10. develop close working relationships with the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT); the Community Relations Council; the work on Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC); the community and voluntary sector; the Department for Communities;

and other stakeholders involved in promoting cultural pluralism and respect for diversity; and

- 5.5.11. provide corporate support/shared services (IT, finance, HR, legal etc.) to both Commissioners (see below).
- 5.6. An Irish Language Commissioner will be appointed to protect and enhance the development of the use of the Irish language by public authorities, including by providing advice and guidance, and introducing, supporting and monitoring the use of best practice language standards.
- 5.7. The Commissioner will be appointed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister as a key element of providing, under statute, official recognition of the status of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.
- 5.8. The main function of the Commissioner will be to protect and enhance the development of the Irish language. The Commissioner will:
 - 5.8.1. prepare, in accordance with guidance from Ministers, best practice standards for the use of the Irish language by public authorities - these standards are to be agreed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister;
 - 5.8.2. provide support to public authorities in connection with those standards;
 - 5.8.3. monitor the performance of public authorities in meeting those standards; and
 - 5.8.4. investigate complaints where a public authority has failed to have due regard to those standards.
- 5.9. The legislation will stipulate that the Commissioner will, prior to introduction, consult on the development of a number of categories and standards. Each public body will be assessed and placed in one of the categories on the basis of set criteria such as the level of interaction with the public, number of employees and established need. There will be a 'sliding scale' of standards within categories dependent on the criteria. The Commissioner will engage with each public body to agree how it can fulfil its requirement under the standards; and each public body will develop an implementation plan.

- 5.10. With specific reference to paragraph 5.8.1 above, guidance issued by Ministers should emphasise the importance of the Commissioner producing best practice standards that:
 - 5.10.1. reflect the guiding principles of the framework as set out in legislation, and serve to promote mutual respect, good relations, understanding and reconciliation;
 - 5.10.2. take account of consultation with public authorities; and
 - 5.10.3. place requirements on public authorities that are reasonable, proportionate and practical.
- 5.11. The guidance will ask the Commissioner, as a first priority, to focus on developing best practice standards that facilitate interaction between Irish language users and public bodies, including but not limited to making information or forms available in Irish where required, enabling widely used public websites to have an Irish Language translation available, and ensuring that public bodies reply in Irish where practical to correspondence in Irish. Public bodies will each continue to make their own decisions on other matters to do with the Irish language.
- 5.12. Best practice standards recommended by the Commissioner, and all subsequent changes to those standards, are to be put for approval to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- 5.13. The legislation in respect of Irish language will also include the repeal of the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737 and make any necessary statutory provision for births, marriages and deaths to be registrable through Irish, and for wills to be validly made in Irish, as an option and matter for individual choice. Irish and other languages will be facilitated when deemed necessary by the courts. Nothing in the legislation will affect the status of the English Language.
- 5.14. A further such commissioner will be appointed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition in Northern Ireland.
- 5.15. The Commissioner's remit will include the areas of education, research, media, cultural activities and facilities and tourism initiatives.
- 5.16. The functions of the Commissioner will be to –

- 5.16.1. increase awareness and visibility of relevant services which are provided by public authorities in Northern Ireland;
 - 5.16.2. provide advice and guidance to public authorities, including where relevant on the effect and implementation, so far as affecting Ulster Scots, of commitments under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and;
 - 5.16.3. investigate complaints where a public authority fails to have due regard to such advice provided by the Commissioner in respect of facilitating the use of Ulster Scots.
- 5.17. With specific reference to 5.16 above, the functions of the Commissioner should be exercised in a way that:
- 5.17.1. reflects the guiding principles of the framework as set out in legislation, and serve to promote mutual respect, good relations, understanding and reconciliation;
 - 5.17.2. takes account of consultation with public authorities;
 - 5.17.3. are reasonable, proportionate and practical.
- 5.18. Both Commissioners will, in discharging their functions, act independently and consistently with the principles set out in paragraph 5.2 above.
- 5.19. The legislation will also include a duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate the use and understanding of Ulster Scots in the education system.
- 5.20. In fulfilling their roles, both Commissioners will work in close cooperation with the Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch, and with Foras na Gaeilge with a view to ensuring complementarity.
- 5.21. Furthermore, provisions for both Irish language and Ulster Scots will be made for the following:
- 5.21.1. a central Translation Hub will be established in the Department of Finance within three months of an agreement, in order to provide language translation services for the 9 Executive Departments, Arm's Length Bodies, Local Government and Public Bodies.

- 5.21.2. the Assembly's Standing Orders will be amended to allow any person to conduct their business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee through Irish or Ulster Scots. A simultaneous translation system will be made available in the Assembly to ensure that a person without Irish or Ulster Scots is not placed at a disadvantage.
- 5.21.3. under Section 28D of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the re-established Executive will produce a draft Irish Language Strategy and a draft Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy for consultations within 6 months. This will include programmes and schemes which will assist in the development of the Irish language and the Ulster Scots language, culture and heritage.
- 5.21.4. however, nothing in legislation or in the functions of the Commissioners shall require any quotas in employment for speakers of any particular language.

Processing Legislation

- 5.22. The parties have agreed to legislate in respect of the core elements of the framework outlined above.
- 5.23. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 – as the core legislative vehicle which implements the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and subsequent agreements – will be amended by the introduction and enactment of three Bills. Draft Bills will be officially published on the day of the formation of the Executive and presented to the Assembly for consideration within 3 months of the restoration of the institutions, as part of an integrated package of legislation that will pass through the legislative process simultaneously. The three Bills will make provision as follows:
- **Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment No 1) Bill**
To make provisions to establish the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.
 - **Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment No 2) Bill**
To make provisions for the Irish Language.
 - **Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment No 3) Bill**
To make provisions to establish a Commissioner to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots / Ulster British tradition in Northern Ireland.

- 5.24. The three Bills will share a common framework through linked references in each Bill to the principles set out in paragraph 5.2 above. It is intended that the Bills will be introduced as part of an integrated package of legislation, and accordingly no Bill should be regarded as independent from the other two.
- 5.25. Once enacted by the Assembly, the three Bills will amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by inserting the provisions as new, separate Parts. The Irish language provisions will form a new [Part X] of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The provisions dealing with the second Commissioner will be inserted as [Part Y]; and provisions dealing with the Office for Identity and Cultural Expression as [Part Z].

Bill of Rights

- 5.26. An Ad-Hoc Assembly Committee will be established to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights that is faithful to the stated intention of the 1998 Agreement in that it contains rights supplementary to those contained in the European Convention on Human Rights, which are currently applicable and “that reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland”; as well as reflecting the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem.
- 5.27. The Ad-Hoc Committee will be assisted in its work by a Panel of five experts appointed jointly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- 5.28. The Panel should initially seek to advise the Ad-Hoc Committee on what constitutes our “particular circumstances” drawing upon, but not bound by, previous work on a Bill of Rights and should review and make recommendations on how the UK’s withdrawal from the EU may impact on our “particular circumstances”.
- 5.29. The terms of reference and timetable of the Committee will be agreed within 30 working days of the restoration of devolution. The establishment of cross party and cross community support will be critical to advancing a Bill of Rights.

Sign Language

- 5.30. A draft framework and policy proposals for legislation on sign language have been consulted on by the Department for Communities. The Parties agree to the process of drafting clauses commencing with a view to introducing a Bill to the Assembly at the early stage.

Annex F: Agreement Review and Monitoring

- 6.1. The parties are very conscious that the integrity and credibility of this Agreement is dependent on its effective and expeditious implementation. Accordingly, progress in implementing the provisions of this Agreement must be actively reviewed and monitored alongside or in coordination with arrangements to monitor the implementation of previous Agreements
- 6.2. There will be a need for Implementation Review Meetings which will include the Northern Ireland Executive's party leaders. There will be quarterly meetings, with the first meeting held before the end of January 2020 at which an Implementation Programme and Timetable will be agreed. The UK Government and the Irish Government will be involved as appropriate in accordance with the three stranded approach.
- 6.3. Quarterly updates on progress on the implementation of the Agreement will be published.

Appendix 1 - Programme for Government

This annex supports the possible outline of a Programme for Government set out above. The parties agree to publish, within two weeks of the restoration of the institutions, the fuller details of an agreed Programme for Government. The parties recognise that the final Programme for Government will need to be agreed by the parties who form the Executive.

Programme for Government 2019/20 – Priority Actions

1. The focus of the 2019/20 Programme will be on actions and decisions capable of achieving impact in key priority areas. These will include:

Housing

- i. The Programme for Government outcomes framework will be augmented with a new outcome and indicators to provide specific focus on ensuring every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs.
- ii. There will be enhanced investment in new social home starts and the Executive will bring forward legislation which is urgently needed to reclassify Housing Associations as external to the public sector to ensure the continuation of new social house building and the Co-ownership Housing Scheme.
- iii. The Executive will examine options to remove historical debt from the NIHE and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax.
- iv. The Executive will agree a long term trajectory for the rental charges of the NIHE. This must be sufficient to support the long term future of the NIHE's social housing stock for future generations of tenants. This must also always provide demonstrably affordable rents to tenants.
- v. Measures will also be introduced including, where necessary, legislation to provide for controls to ensure affordability.

Education

- vi. A suite of actions that will begin to address resourcing pressures in the education system and deliver quick results in terms of improved efficiency and effectiveness.

- vii. Deliver an enhanced approach to careers advice, curriculum, training and apprenticeships to enhance employability.
- viii. Enhanced strategic focus and supporting actions on educating our children and young people together in the classroom, in order to build a shared and integrated society.
- ix. Establish an expert group to examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background and draw up an action plan for change that will ensure all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life.
- x. The issues highlighted in the NIAO review of Special Educational Need will be addressed as a priority.

Childcare

- xi. The Executive will publish a Childcare Strategy and will give immediate priority to developing arrangements to deliver extended, affordable, responsive, high quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4.

Investment

- xii. The Executive will bring forward proposals for the development and expansion of the UU campus at Magee College, including the necessary increase in maximum student numbers to realise the 10,000 student campus target and a Graduate Entry Medical School.
- xiii. Support for City Deal packages for Derry & Strabane and Belfast and the bid being developed by Mid-Ulster; Armagh City; Banbridge and Craigavon; and, Fermanagh and Omagh Councils.
- xiv. Plan to complete both the Regional and Sub Regional Sports Stadia Programmes.

Tackling paramilitarism

- xv. A targeted and specific focus across government to tackle paramilitarism.

Fair and sustainable welfare reform

- xvi. A review of welfare mitigation measures will be taken forward as a priority, with any agreed measures in place before March 2020.

Leaner government

- xvii. Define terms of reference and initiate an efficiency and effectiveness review of all Arm's Length Bodies with the aim of concluding the review and agreeing timescales for implementation within 6 months of the Executive being restored.

Sustainable public finances

- xviii. Establishment of the Fiscal Council envisaged in the Stormont House and Fresh Start agreements. This will provide independent scrutiny and expert advice to the Executive and the Assembly on fiscal and budgetary matters, with a particular focus on sustainability. The Fiscal Council will also provide independent monitoring and reporting on the Executive's performance in delivering the Programme for Government.
- xix. Review of funding models, to create a more sustainable budget with the flexibility needed to support delivery of high quality, outcomes-focused public services.
- xx. Structures will be put in place that will help deliver timely and fair public sector pay awards.

Policing

- xxi. A renewed focus will be put on strengthening approaches and supporting mechanisms for policing in the community. This will be complemented with an increase in resources, both human and financial, for the neighbouring policing teams.

Employment Rights

- xxii. The parties agree that the Executive should commit to becoming a Living Wage employer. They further agree that the Executive should move to ban zero hours contracts and that powers to set minimum wage levels should be made a devolved matter. An Age, Goods and Facilities and Services Bill should also be brought forward by the Executive as basis for ensuring that no one is discriminated against because of their age.

Appendix 2 - Programme for Government

This annex supports the possible outline of a Programme for Government set out above. The parties agree to publish, within two weeks of the restoration of the institutions, the fuller details of an agreed Programme for Government. The parties recognise that the final Programme for Government will need to be agreed by the parties who form the Executive.

Programme for Government 2020 and beyond – Strategic Priorities

1. The parties support the existing draft framework of 12 outcomes. However, whilst this will be used for an initial Programme for the remainder of 2019/20, it must evolve to reflect the following agreed strategic priorities in developing a longer term Programme for 2020 and beyond. The new Programme for Government will be supported by an Anti-poverty strategy, an Economic/Industrial strategy and an Investment strategy. These three key strategies will be interwoven with the Programme for Government and their delivery will be closely monitored to ensure they achieve the desired impact in these key areas.

Ending paramilitarism

- i. The parties reaffirm their commitment to tackling paramilitarism. Ending the harm done by paramilitarism will be made a strategic priority in the revised Programme for Government outcomes.

Ending sectarianism

- ii. There will be an enhanced strategic focus within the Programme for Government on ending sectarianism and robust supporting strategies and actions will be put in place.
- iii. All Parties reaffirm their support for the right to freedom from sectarianism, sectarian harassment and intimidation. The Executive's 'Together Building a United Community' Strategy defines sectarianism as, threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour or attitudes towards a person by reason of that person's religious belief or political opinion; or to an individual as a member of such a group'.
- iv. The TBUC Strategy outlines a vision of 'a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance'.

- v. The parties recognise the need to tackle sectarianism, prejudice and hate in seeking to eliminate discrimination. The parties endorse the objectives outlined above and wish to see sectarianism given legal expression as a hate crime. To this end, the parties believe the Executive should formulate and require all public representatives to commit to an anti-sectarian pledge.

Health and social care

- vi. The programme of transformation agreed by the previous Executive will continue to be a priority. Within this, there will be a greater focus on mental health and well-being.

Education²

- vii. The education system has a diversity of school types, each with its own distinctive ethos and values. However it is not sustainable. The parties acknowledge the progress made in developing new models of sharing, cooperation and integration. There is a desire to build on this as a basis for delivering long term improvements in the quality, equity and sustainability of the system. The parties agree that the Executive will commission and oversee an independent fundamental review with a focus on quality and sustainability. The educational experience and outcomes for children and young people are the most important factors.

Housing

- viii. Building on the actions in year 1, the parties agree on the need for continued attention and priority to be given to housing within the Programme for Government 2020 and beyond. The specific housing outcome and indicators, which will focus on ensuring every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs, will be supported by robust programmes and actions.

Climate Change

- ix. The parties recognise the need for a coordinated and strategic approach to the challenge of climate change within the Programme for Government. Actions and interventions will be required across a wide range of areas in order to address

² In this document, 'education' means education for children and young people in early years, primary, post-primary or further education settings. "Education" includes all aspects of Education including Sectoral Bodies, ETI curriculum, area planning, 14-19 Strategy, Entitlement Framework, teacher training and the interface between Higher Education and Further Education.

both the immediate and longer term impacts of climate change in a fair and just way. To this end:

- The Executive's strategies to reduce carbon emissions will be reviewed in light of the Paris Climate Change Accord and the climate crisis.
- A new Energy Strategy will set ambitious targets and actions for a fair and just transition to a zero carbon society.
- The Executive should bring forward a Climate Change Act to give environmental targets a strong legal underpinning.
- The Executive will establish an Independent Environmental Protection Agency to oversee this work and ensure targets are met.
- The Economic Strategy will support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal.
- The Executive will create a plan to eliminate plastic pollution.
- RHI will be closed down and replaced by a scheme that effectively cuts carbon emissions.

Workers' Rights

- x. There will be an enhanced focus within the Programme for Government on creating good jobs and protecting workers rights. The parties agree that access to good jobs, where workers have a voice that provides a level of autonomy, a decent income, security of tenure, satisfying work in the right quantities and decent working conditions, should be integral to public policy given how this contributes to better health and wellbeing by tackling inequalities, building self-efficacy and combating poverty.

Annex A: UK Government Commitments to Northern Ireland

The following annex represents the commitments that would be made by the UK Government to the restored Executive to support a diverse, prosperous Northern Ireland in the context of an agreement being reached, in line with the Government's ongoing commitment to the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. This by no means represents the limit of the UK Government's commitment to Northern Ireland. No agreement is asked or required from the parties for these commitments. This annex is the responsibility of the UK Government alone.

Annex A: UK Government Commitments to Northern Ireland

This note sets out commitments that would be made by the UK Government to the restored Executive and to support a diverse, prosperous Northern Ireland in the context of an agreement being reached.

The UK Government fully respects and is committed to the full implementation of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and its successors. The UK Government will always be steadfast in maintaining Northern Ireland's place within the Union in accordance with the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland.

This note sets out commitments made by the UK Government to support a restored Executive and to support a diverse, prosperous Northern Ireland.

Supporting the institutions

1. The Government is fully committed to all the institutions of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, including the Executive, Assembly, North South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. To support the best possible functioning of the institutions, the Government will establish a bi-annual, Cabinet delegation with the Northern Ireland Executive to improve cooperation and collaboration.
2. The Government will keep under review the ongoing operation of the reformed Petition of Concern mechanism. The Government will report every six months on the ongoing operation of the Petition of Concern and will lay a copy of the review before both Houses of Parliament and, before the end of this Assembly mandate, will publish its conclusions on whether further reform is necessary.
3. Annex A sets out areas of additional financial support from the UK Government, and the conditions that would be attached. The precise figures of financial support would be finalised in conjunction with the parties rapidly in the coming days in the context of agreement to restore the Executive and Assembly.

Strengthening the economy

4. Enhance the assistance from business-supporting UK Government departments in NI, including DIT, working in partnership with Northern Ireland agencies, including InvestNI. This will include supporting the delivery of the Northern Ireland International

Trade plan, establishing a new Trade Advisory Board, appointment of Northern Ireland Trade Ambassadors, and developing a Trade Accelerator Plan and a “Made in NI” campaign.

5. Host an annual meeting of the Board of Trade in Northern Ireland and organise joint Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government trade missions.
6. Promote Northern Ireland as a global cyber security hub, building on its blend of world-class talent, leading forensic science expertise and tech research excellence to achieve 5,000 cyber security professionals in Northern Ireland by 2030.
7. Scope the establishment of a Northern Ireland hub in London - complementing the Invest Northern Ireland London Hub - to provide an increased opportunity for Northern Ireland stakeholder engagement in London. In tandem, explore the creation of a UK Government hub in Northern Ireland to increase the visibility and accessibility of UK Government departments in Northern Ireland.

Future relationship with the European Union

8. The UK Government recognises the importance for Northern Ireland of the negotiations with the European Union on a new trading relationship, and on the implementation of the Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement on Northern Ireland and Ireland. We have already committed to ensuring that there is a New Deal for Northern Ireland as we leave the European Union, maximising trade opportunities and investment. The Government is determined to get the right deal for Northern Ireland and the whole of the United Kingdom, and would welcome close engagement with a restored Executive on Northern Ireland’s priorities in the next phase.
9. In recognition of this, the Government will ensure that representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive are invited to be part of the UK delegation in any meetings of the UK-EU Specialised or Joint Committees discussing Northern Ireland specific matters which are also being attended by the Irish Government as part of the European Union’s delegation.
10. The Government welcomes the consensus reached by all the parties recently on the protections they wish to see for trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain under the Protocol. The Government is absolutely committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the UK internal market, in line with the clear guarantee in the Protocol that Northern Ireland remains in the customs territory of the United Kingdom. To address the issues raised by the parties, we will legislate to guarantee unfettered access for Northern Ireland’s businesses to the whole of the UK internal market, and ensure that this legislation is in force for 1 January 2021. The government will engage in detail with a restored Executive on measures to protect and strengthen the UK internal market.

11. We will aim to negotiate with the European Union additional flexibilities and sensible practical measures across all aspects of the Protocol that are supported by business groups in Northern Ireland and maximise the free flow of trade. The Government commits to ensuring that Northern Ireland's businesses benefit from the UK's new Free Trade Agreements signed with other countries, and to consulting a restored Executive along with the other devolved administrations on our wider trade policy.
12. As part of wider work examining funding options to support preparedness for entering new trading arrangements with the European Union and support for businesses, the Government will engage specifically with the Executive on the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland and the Protocol.

Delivering on our commitments

The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement

13. The Government has reviewed the consistency of its family migration arrangements, taking into account the letter and spirit of the Belfast Agreement and recognising that the policy should not create incentives for renunciation of British citizenship by those citizens who may wish to retain it.
14. The Government will change the rules governing how the people of Northern Ireland bring their family members to the UK. This change will mean that eligible family members of the people of Northern Ireland will be able to apply for UK immigration status on broadly the same terms as the family members of Irish citizens in the UK.
15. This immigration status will be available to the family members of all the people of Northern Ireland, no matter whether they hold British or Irish citizenship or both, no matter how they identify.

The Stormont House Agreement

16. As part of the Government's wider legislative agenda, the Government will, within 100 days, publish and introduce legislation in the UK Parliament to implement the Stormont House Agreement, to address Northern Ireland legacy issues. The Government will now start an intensive process with the Northern Ireland parties, and the Irish Government as appropriate, to maintain a broad-based consensus on these issues, recognising that any such UK Parliament legislation should have the consent of the NI Assembly.

The Fresh Start Agreement

17. Continue to ensure that PSNI and others are appropriately resourced to deal with terrorism and paramilitary activity, provide funding to ensure the work of the Programme to Tackle Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime can

continue and redouble efforts to address commitments arising from the Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland.

Our commitments to veterans

18. Introduce UK-wide legislation to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law and support full implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant.
19. Appoint a Northern Ireland Veterans' Commissioner to act as an independent point of contact to support and enhance outcomes for veterans in Northern Ireland.
20. Initiate a review of the Aftercare Service in Northern Ireland (ACS) which will consider whether the remit of the ACS should be widened to cover all HM Forces veterans living in Northern Ireland with service-related injuries and conditions.
21. Ensure that the work of the War Memorials Trust who protect and conserve war memorials across the UK is better promoted and understood in Northern Ireland.

Promoting Northern Ireland's culture, heritage and society

22. Work alongside the restored Executive, to mark the centenary of Northern Ireland in 2021 in a spirit of mutual respect, inclusiveness and reconciliation in line with the principles for remembering. This approach to the centenary will provide an opportunity to reflect on the past as well as to build for the future, within NI, across the UK, across the island of Ireland and internationally. We will make available funding to support a number of projects to mark the centenary. This will include facilitating national recognition and international awareness of this significant anniversary, as well as exploring projects such as a Shared History Fund, the restoration of Craigavon House and the Great Ulster Forest.
23. Support discussions with NI Screen to explore how the remit of the Ulster Scots Broadcasting Fund (USBF) and Irish Language Broadcasting Fund (ILBF) can be broadened, and will increase funding for the USBF and ILBF to reflect any broadened remit.
24. Recognise Ulster Scots as a national minority under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.
25. Provide funding to establish the Castlereagh Foundation, a fund to support academic research through Universities and other partners to explore identity and the shifting patterns of social identity in Northern Ireland.
26. Provide funding to establish a Culture and Community fund to support expression of identities and progress cultural development in the region and beyond, supporting

various groups in the expression of culture, arts and heritage and community halls and bands.

27. Update the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 to bring the list of designated flag flying days from Northern Ireland government buildings and court-houses into line with the DCMS designated days, meaning the same designated days will be observed in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the UK going forward. This will involve the addition of three designated days.
28. Facilitate the establishment of a connected classroom programme to provide young people in Northern Ireland with the opportunity to connect, engage and collaborate with other young people across the UK as well as a programme of intercultural exchanges for young people between the regions of the UK to support increased cultural connections and understanding of the diversity of identity and culture within the UK.
29. Foster closer ties and better collaborative working across a range of sectors in the UK chiefly tourism, sport and culture. This will mean attracting a portfolio of national and international events, including through developing a proposed UK-Ireland bid for the 2030 FIFA world cup.
30. Facilitate the establishment of a homecoming project, strengthening links and relationships with the Northern Ireland diaspora and alumni across the world to be harnessed to improve the understanding of Northern Ireland and its contribution on the international stage as well as exploring economic opportunities.

Annex A: UK Government Financial and Economic Commitments to Northern Ireland

In the context of an agreement to restore the Northern Ireland Executive, the UK Government will provide the additional financial support set out in this Annex, subject to the conditions listed.

These commitments apply solely in the event that the Executive is restored through this deal. If the Executive is not restored, the additional support set out here falls away. In that scenario, the UK Government will need to examine what additional revenue raising and other measures are required to balance the Northern Ireland budget.

This Annex sets out the areas that the UK Government's financial commitment will cover, and the conditions that would be attached. The precise figures of financial support would be finalised rapidly in the coming days in the context of a restored Executive and Assembly.

There will be four key elements to the financial package: immediate support to the health service and to address budget pressures; investment to transform public services; turbocharging infrastructure delivery in Northern Ireland; and addressing Northern Ireland's unique circumstances. This investment sits alongside the separate financial package being put forward by the Irish Government.

This financial package will be accompanied by stringent conditions to deliver a greater level of accountability for public spending and ensure the Northern Ireland Executive is building sustainable public services for all the people of Northern Ireland. This includes commitments on reform, independent monitoring and reporting of the Executive's performance, and a role for the UK Government in overseeing implementation of this and previous agreements.

Providing the Executive with additional support for 2020/21, and addressing the health crisis

Recognising the unique challenges faced by NI public services in addition to supporting the resolution of the nurses' pay dispute.

- Providing **additional funding for the Executive in 2020/21** to give the Executive time to place Northern Ireland's finances on a sustainable footing, and address its priorities, such as delivering parity with England and Wales for nurses' pay - bringing an end to the ongoing nurses' pay dispute.

Transforming Public Services

Delivering reform in the essential public services of health, education and justice.

- Investing in **transforming public services**, including:
 - **Health services** - supporting full implementation of the Bengoa review in health, the 'Delivering Together' and 'Power to People' healthcare transformation reports and delivering more care in the community.
 - Improvements and reforms to deliver a **better and more efficient education system** - including through an external, independent review of education provision.
 - **Ensuring faster, fairer justice**, implementing committal reform which will benefit victims and witnesses, and reducing reoffending and delivering safer communities.

Turbocharging infrastructure

The Executive will benefit from increased funding for capital infrastructure investment as a result of the UK Government's infrastructure revolution.

- Infrastructure funding will enable the Executive to invest in a range of potential capital projects such as:
 - Essential sewage investment (Living With Water Programme)
 - 'Better Connecting Dublin and Belfast' strategy
 - A5/A6 roads
 - York Street Interchange
 - Narrow Water bridge
 - Capital and resource funding for the Medical School in Derry/Londonderry, subject to the Northern Ireland Executive's approval of the project.
- The UK Government agrees to financial flexibility to reprofile funding provided as part of the Fresh Start Agreement for shared and integrated education and housing.

Implementing the Stormont House Agreement

The Government will provide funding to support the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement proposals on legacy.

- Funding to support the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement proposals on legacy.

Addressing Northern Ireland's unique circumstances

The Government will make funding available for a range of projects aimed at supporting community and reconciliation initiatives to remove barriers, bring the people of Northern Ireland together and build a safer, more secure society in Northern Ireland. This could include areas such as:

- Additional funding to **support mental health** over three years.
- Additional funding for **tackling paramilitarism**.
- A fund to support a new Executive in **tackling deprivation and improving opportunity**.
- A **Culture and Community fund**
- Funding to support marking **the 2021 centenary and related projects**.
- Support for **languages and broadcasting**.
- Supporting the **armed forces and veterans**, including funding for a new Veteran's Commissioner.
- **A fund to promote the competitiveness of Northern Ireland's economy**, including through trade missions and the GREAT campaign.
- Additional funding to support the **Derry/Londonderry addiction centre**.
- UK Contribution to the **International Fund For Ireland**

Conditions of the UK Government Financial Commitments in Support of a Restored Northern Ireland Executive

This funding package is accompanied by a number of conditions designed to ensure that UK Government funding contributes to increasing overall fiscal and budgetary sustainability in Northern Ireland's public finances. The funding is dependent on the functioning of the institutions and all funding provided in this financial package will be withdrawn if the institutions collapse.

Conditions to promote budgetary, fiscal and political stability:

- An independent Fiscal Council will be established in Northern Ireland by July 2020. As per the Fresh Start Agreement, the membership and terms of reference of this Council will be agreed with the UK Government. It would:
 - prepare an annual assessment of the Executive's revenue streams and spending proposals and how these allow the Executive to balance their budget; and
 - prepare a further annual report on the sustainability of the Executive's public finances, including the implications of spending policy and the effectiveness of long-term efficiency measures; and
 - have its membership and terms of reference agreed with the UK Government.
- From 2021/22 the Executive will put in place multi-year budgets (minimum 3 years) where the UK Government has provided multi-year funding. The Executive commits to delivering a balanced budget for Northern Ireland and to take steps to put Northern Ireland's finances on a sustainable footing.
- The UK Government will carefully review the findings of the RHI Inquiry Report, and consider its implications for the use of public money in Northern Ireland, accountability, and the wider responsibility of the UK Government to consider the public interest in good governance and public administration.

Conditions to promote sustainable public services transformation:

- There will be regular (quarterly) reviews of UK Government funding provided under this agreement, and implementation of all agreements via a UK Government - NI Executive Joint Board. This will be convened by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and will include the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- The Joint Board would have as part of its Terms of Reference in particular the oversight of transformation efforts in health, education and justice where these would draw on funding under this agreement (this does not displace other normally-required

approvals). As part of that oversight the Board would keep under review healthcare delivery structures in Northern Ireland, and be able to establish a separate sub-committee to consider health transformation in particular, drawing on external expertise as appropriate. The Board would also consider the effectiveness of infrastructure delivery, including drawing on expertise from the Infrastructure and Projects Authority as appropriate.

Annex B: Irish Government Commitments

The following annex sets out commitments by the Irish Government in the context of an agreement being reached in support of greater cooperation, connectivity and opportunity North/ South on the island, working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government, in line with the Irish Government's ongoing commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. No agreement is asked or required from the parties for these commitments. This annex is the responsibility of the Irish Government alone.

Annex B: Irish Government Commitments

This note sets out commitments by the Irish Government in the context of an agreement being reached in support of greater cooperation, connectivity and opportunity North/ South on the island, working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government.

The restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, Northern Ireland Assembly and the North / South Ministerial Council to operation is a hugely important opportunity to set an ambitious and positive agenda for all the people of Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland North and South, as well as East-West on these islands.

Overall, this should address:

- Connectivity and infrastructure
- Investment in the North-West and border communities
- Research and Innovation
- Strategic challenges, including Brexit and Climate Change
- Language and Culture
- Reconciliation

The Irish Government will work with the Northern Ireland Executive, through the North / South Ministerial Council, to help deliver projects that will benefit people across the island.

The Government is also ready to participate constructively in discussion on how the British Irish Council can develop its work in the future, in the context of Brexit, taking account of the ongoing work of the BIC Secretariat to consider options in this context.

The Irish Government also remains committed to holding meetings of the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference at regular intervals.

The Irish Government will establish a working group composed of representatives of the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association as well as the Clerk of the Dáil to consider and make recommendations within six months focussed on developing North / South parliamentary relationships.

Connectivity and Infrastructure

Specifically, as set out in the National Development Plan, the Government will update and enhance its commitment to jointly funding cross-border investment, once the power-sharing institutions are operational again.

The Government wants to work with the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government to achieve greater connectivity on this island – by road, rail and air.

We believe this is an immediate opportunity to move forward quickly together to deliver on plans to complete key infrastructure projects including the A5 and the Ulster Canal connection from Clones to Upper Lough Erne. The Government will deliver on its funding commitments to those projects, including a total of £75 million up to 2022 for the A5.

The Irish Government is supportive of serious and detailed joint consideration through the NSMC of the feasibility of a high-speed rail connection between Belfast, Dublin and Cork, creating a spine of connectivity on the island, which could be progressed as a priority. The Government is also ready to jointly progress consideration of options for the development of the Narrow Water bridge project at the NSMC.

The Irish Government also intends to take forward a review of the potential for Government support to renewed viable air routes from Cork to Belfast and Dublin to Derry, working with the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive to deliver improved connections as a priority.

We believe there is enormous immediate potential for other projects, including Greenways in border areas, such as the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway. We are ready to consider a further development funding application to be submitted in January and are committed to taking this project forward to deliver sustainable tourism and other enterprise benefits for the region.

Investment in the North West and Border Communities

The Irish Government fully recognises the need for further investment and development in border areas.

The Irish Government has introduced a wide range of support programmes for enterprise and the agri-food sector, including the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme, the €300 million Future Growth Loan Scheme, Enterprise Ireland's Brexit Scorecard, Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer, and InterTradeIreland's Brexit Vouchers. The Government is also continuing preparatory work for Brexit-mitigation actions under Budget 2020 and targeted funding for the sectors most affected in the event of a no deal Brexit.

The Government has also recognised that the North West region is in particular need of strategic investment, and that there is a clear argument for further enhancing cross-border cooperation and connections, to the benefit of all.

The Irish Government welcomes the UK Government's announcement to invest up to £105m in Derry and the North West through the Derry and Strabane City Deal and the Inclusive Future Fund. The Irish Government is committed to exploring opportunities for investment that will further support opportunities to bring greater economic prosperity and social benefits to the wider region.

In this context, the Irish Government welcomes the development of plans for ambitious new higher education provision in Derry. This investment can support more access to third-level education for young people on a cross-border basis, enable further cooperation between third-level institutions in the North West including in research and innovation, and underpin broader economic development and opportunities in the region. The Government is willing in principle to contribute to capital investment to support expanded provision at Ulster University Magee Campus, alongside the commitment made as part of this agreement by the UK Government. We look forward to early discussion at the North South Ministerial Council on taking forward this coordinated investment in order to deliver this vital project for the North West region.

- ***North West Strategic Growth Partnership***

The Irish Government remains committed to continuing to support the work of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership and is committed in principle to providing further funding to the North West Development Fund in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Government is ready to continue discussions through the North West Strategic Growth Partnership on key projects for employment and sustainable development in the region, including the Foyle River Gardens Project initiative.

Research and Innovation

We look forward to developing proposals for an enhanced North/South programme of research and innovation, in cooperation with the NI Executive through the NSMC.

The Government would be interested in jointly exploring the feasibility of an all-island research hub, in cooperation with relevant agencies and stakeholders, North and South.

Strategic Challenges

The Government also believes that the North South Ministerial Council can take forward important action-oriented dialogue in the context of the implications of Brexit, as well as other strategic challenges for these islands, including all-island cooperation and coordination to tackle climate breakdown.

The North South Bodies are a vital part of delivering all-island cooperation as an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement. The Government is ready to immediately resume discussions with the Executive on the next period of corporate planning guidance for the North South Bodies and on necessary resourcing within wider budgetary parameters.

Language and Culture

The Irish Government welcomes the agreement on a way forward on language and culture issues by the parties in Northern Ireland, to be implemented by the Executive and Assembly as a matter of priority.

The Government remains committed to the work of the North / South language bodies and to the promotion of the Irish language.

In this context, the Government will make provision for additional funding over 3 years with a contribution to the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund, and funding for a promotional programme by An Ciste Infheistíochta Gaeilge to be delivered in partnership with Irish medium community groups, Glór na nGael and the Gaelbhratach Scheme. Funding will also be provided to develop Irish Language Networks.

Reconciliation

- *International Fund for Ireland*

In recognition of the particular challenges which Northern Ireland continues to face and the unique capabilities of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) to work effectively for all communities in Northern Ireland and border counties, the Government is committed in principle to significant new funding for the IFI, working with other partners, to support the delivery of the IFI Strategy 2021-2024.

- *Reconciliation Fund*

The Government will also maintain the enhanced level of funding for the Reconciliation Fund at €3.7 million per year in support of projects in Northern Ireland and border areas, with a focus on the most hard-to-reach and marginalised communities in terms of economic and social deprivation.

We will also, in cooperation with the Executive, commission a study to identify challenges facing border communities, paying particular attention to the needs of minorities in border counties, and explore options, including establishment of dedicated funding streams, to address gaps in current support.

- ***PEACE PLUS***

Ireland has consistently prioritised the continuation of EU PEACE funding including through ongoing engagement at EU level. We will continue work with our EU partners and the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that the PEACE PLUS programme, building on and continuing the work of both PEACE and INTERREG, will be delivered through the Special EU Programmes Body in support of reconciliation and harnessing the opportunities of our peace for all.

- ***North South School Exchange Programme***

Building on the success of the recent pilot programme of bringing pupils together - from schools North and South of the Border, from Nationalist and Unionist communities, and from the Integrated Schools sector - to meet, discuss issues of mutual concern and visit sites of significant shared historic relevance, we will expand the scheme over the lifetime of the next Government with a target of achieving 100 such cross border engagements per annum within a 5 year programme.

- ***Stormont House Agreement***

The Government affirms its commitment to working with the UK Government to support the establishment of the Stormont House Agreement legacy institutions as a matter of urgency, including by introducing necessary implementing legislation in the Oireachtas, to deal with the legacy of the Troubles and support reconciliation, meeting the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors.