



NORTHERN IRELAND INFORMATION SERVICE

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SECRETARY OF STATE OUTLINES GOVERNMENTS PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Paul Murphy, MP, has said the Government remains committed to building a secure future for all the people here through the restoration of the Assembly and Executive.

Speaking at Corrymeela where he launched a document outlining progress and priorities for the coming months, the Secretary of State said: **"Northern Ireland is best governed by local politicians taking decisions on local needs and priorities. This is what the people of Northern Ireland want and deserve, and this is why we remain committed to working towards building the trust and confidence necessary to restore all the institutions of the Agreement. In the interim, however, my Ministerial colleagues and I have a duty to provide good governance, building on the progress made by the Executive.**

"Our objective is to develop the Executive's agenda so that it can resume operation as seamlessly as possible. Over the past six months, we have moved that agenda forward, building on the priorities identified by local Ministers and taking decisions wherever possible to give effect to the commitments the Executive made in its draft Programme for Government."

Turning to some of the priorities for the coming months, the Secretary of State said: **"We have been particularly conscious that the cornerstone of the Executive's last Programme for Government was reinvestment and reform and have given priority to this area, forming the Strategic Investment Board and launching a major Strategic Investment Programme. Over a period of a few years this aims to provide investment of around £2 billion to radically improve Northern Ireland's health, education, infrastructure and water and sewerage treatment services. Delivering on this investment will require additional local revenue to support additional borrowing under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative. The way ahead is also clear for further increases in investment, including investment financed by further use of the borrowing power available under the Reinvestment**

Press Office, Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3SG

Tel: (028) 9052 0700

Fax: (028) 9052 8473 / 8478 / 8482

and Reform Initiative.”

Commenting on the Review of Public Administration, the Secretary of State said that the Review Team should prepare a paper for publication in the autumn, which will form the basis for discussions with local political parties and key stakeholders. It will cover issues which have emerged from the Review's work to date, and will seek to set out a number of alternative high level models of government which could be used as a framework for the development of a new system of administration.

“Whilst the Review is important for the future governance of Northern Ireland, public service reform remains a major agenda item to carry forward. We must focus on delivering a better service to the public in areas which matter most to them – areas such as health, education, public transport and the economy.”

The Secretary of State outlined how legislation would be brought forward on a wide range of issues over the next few months to support the reform of the rating system; facilitate a new entrants scheme in farming; and also in the area of special needs and disability. He also stressed the intention to publish for consultation, policy proposals on a number of areas including companies legislation and planning reform.

“The Government is committed to carrying forward the work of the Executive in addressing the deep communal and social divisions within Northern Ireland. We recognise the importance of tackling unemployment in enhancing social inclusion and, over the past six months, we have taken forward work arising from the report of the Taskforce on Employability and Long Term Unemployment and the West Belfast Taskforces. We are pleased with the progress being made and the developing partnership approach in taking this work forward.

“To support this and other important needs, particularly in the North West, an Integrated Development Fund of some £50 million has been established. Also, in the light of the problems faced by the fishing industry, we have set up a Taskforce to assist south Down fishing villages. The Government remains committed to acting wherever it is required to address problems.

“Alongside these steps, Government is committed to the development of an inclusive equality agenda and a comprehensive human rights programme. Very shortly we will be announcing the appointment of a Commissioner for Children and Young People, putting Northern Ireland at the cutting edge of best practice in the promotion of the rights and best interests of children and young people.

“Victims issues will continue to be a priority. In consultation with victims reconciliation experts and political parties, we will build on the work already under way to generate debate on the next phase of victims policy, and on what else needs to be done to ensure that there is an appropriate forum to address the needs of victims and survivors”

The Secretary of State concluded by emphasising that most of this work had been initiated by the Executive and that, in normal circumstances, the Executive would be taking these issues forward. He said: **"While the restoration of devolution and the other institutions established by the Agreement remains the best approach to government in Northern Ireland, we cannot in the meantime delay the arrival of those opportunities by sitting on our hands. Rather, we will press ahead with the key reinvestment and reform and other policy initiatives undertaken by the Executive in tandem with our continued efforts to secure the political progress which would enable the restoration of the Executive and the other institutions as speedily as possible."**