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Lord Kinnoull
House of Lords
London
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24th September 2020

Dear Lord Kinnoull,

Thank you for your letter of 9 September following my appearance before your Committee on 28 July. I am happy to provide a further update on the points you raised.

Business Engagement Forum (BEF)

Regarding our ongoing engagement with Northern Ireland businesses via the Business Engagement Forum, we have now held 16 meetings with over 60 businesses from a variety of sectors and geographical regions. Most recently this included meetings on FTA negotiations and agriculture, as well as a targeted session with representatives from the aerospace sector. This is complemented by regular engagement carried out by Ministers and officials from across Whitehall.

We have also held discussions on the business guidance published on 7 August and the introduction of the UK Internal Market bill, and engagement continues as negotiations with the EU and preparations for the end of the Transition Period progress. My department will be happy to provide updates as requested, respecting the principle that these meetings are held in confidence to support an open, two-way dialogue between the Government and Northern Ireland's business community.

Article 2 of the Protocol

The Northern Ireland Office is in regular contact with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to discuss matters relating to the operationalisation of the dedicated mechanism to oversee the implementation of Article 2. Further, the Secretary of State and I, along with departmental officials, continue to engage with relevant stakeholders, and have a number of engagements planned in the coming weeks and months.

We are in the process of agreeing the Rules of Procedure for the Joint Consultative Working Group (JCWG) with the European Commission and expect a meeting in the coming weeks. As set out in the Command Paper, we are exploring with the Commission the scope to hold a dedicated session of the JCWG, including relevant external expertise, to consider the implementation of the 'no diminution' commitment in the Protocol.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Walker', written in a cursive style.

**ROBIN WALKER MP
MINISTER OF STATE
NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE**