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Simon Hoare MP
Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Stephen Timms, MP
Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

Dear both,

NIO Response to the First Joint Report of the Work and Pensions and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committees on Welfare policy in Northern Ireland

I would like to thank the joint committee for the work it carried out in reviewing the administration of welfare in NI against the challenging backdrop of the absence of an NI Executive.

Now that the committees have been reconstituted I would like to take this opportunity to respond. The two recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are set out below and relate to Welfare and Criminal Justice which are devolved matters:

- 1. We recommend that, in the continued absence of an Assembly and Executive, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland bring forward proposals to address the anomaly of section 5(1) of the Criminal Law (NI) Act applying to women seeking the nonconsensual exemption, and to professionals processing it. This should be a priority for any incoming Northern Ireland Executive.**
- 2. We recommend that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland make a statement to Parliament as soon as possible making clear the UK**

Government's intention to pass legislation to extend the mitigation package, and bring forward such legislation to come into effect before the end of March 2020. The UK Government should provide funding for the mitigation package—including the Discretionary Support Scheme, the Universal Credit Contingency Fund, and funding for independent advisory services— in a Northern Ireland Budget Act.

As you will be aware, the intensive talks process that took place over the Christmas and New Year period resulted in the restoration of the NI Executive. It is of course excellent news that Stormont is once again up and running, and I am delighted that political leaders in NI have agreed the New Decade, New Approach deal, which sets out the Executive's top priorities for the months and years ahead. This means that public services in Northern Ireland can be transformed, and that issues like welfare can be properly addressed by locally accountable NI Ministers.

I would draw the committee's attention to the New Decade, New Approach agreement which set out the following intention of the NI parties:

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

"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..."

The Executive has now announced that legislation to extend welfare mitigations will be tabled in the NI Assembly.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**RT HON BRANDON LEWIS CBE MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**