



Northern
Ireland
Office

The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

Secretary of State for
Northern Ireland

1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Erskine House
20-32 Chichester St
Belfast
BT1 4GF

E: correspondence@nio.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/nio

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**Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE KC, Chair
Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee**

House of Lords
London,
SW1A 0PW

By email: hlniscrutiny@parliament.uk

16 December 2025

Dear Lord Carlile,

‘STRENGTHENING NI’S VOICE’ INQUIRY AND THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE WINDSOR FRAMEWORK

It was a pleasure meeting with you and the Committee in June to discuss the Committee’s inquiry on Strengthening Northern Ireland’s Voice in the Windsor Framework. The session came ahead of the publication of the report of the Independent Review of the Windsor Framework and was followed by the Committee’s own report.

I am grateful to the Committee for providing its report to the Government in good time so that its recommendations could be considered as part of the Government’s response to the Independent Review. The Government’s response has been published today in line with our legal duties under Schedule 6A NI Act 1998. I am pleased to include a copy of the response alongside this letter.

The Government’s response to the Independent Review also accounts for the views of the Northern Ireland Assembly and representations made to it by a variety of public bodies and stakeholder organisations. I decided that a comprehensive response would be the most appropriate way of responding to the broad and overlapping representations that we received.

In particular, in line with Lord Murphy’s recommendations and with your endorsement, the Government is committing to legislation that will afford the Assembly greater flexibility to consider EU regulations within the democratic scrutiny period and, as part of the measures announced at the Budget, we will be delivering a £16.6 million programme to boost trade within the UK internal market.

This funding will specifically implement an enhanced 'one stop shop' service, beyond what is currently available on GOV.UK, to provide a single place for businesses to get guidance on how to trade across the UK and to promote the opportunities of dual market access. It will also support the work of Intertrade UK.

The Committee may also be interested in work set out by the Government to enhance and, where needed, simplify, engagement with a broad variety of stakeholders, including that which is ongoing with the human rights and equalities sector as well as those whose work supports vital North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland.

The response outlines the Government's continued commitment to work collaboratively with businesses, civil society, the Northern Ireland Executive, and our partners in the EU and its Member States, on all of these issues. As we look ahead, we will continue to be guided by our commitments to implement the Windsor Framework in good faith whilst ensuring the protection of the UK internal market, and seeking to secure an SPS agreement with the EU from which Northern Ireland's traders and hauliers stand to considerably benefit.

I would be most grateful if you could circulate this letter and the Government's response on these issues to Members of the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee, with my sincere thanks for the consideration that you have given to these issues. The Government's response reflects its commitment to ensuring that Northern Ireland's trading arrangements command the broadest possible support, and that will remain our focus moving forwards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Benn'.

**THE RT HON HILARY BENN MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**