

Press release: Industry-led review details plans to increase social impact investments in the UK

The review was commissioned by the government and led by Elizabeth Corley, chair of Allianz Global Investors, and an independent Advisory Group made up of 60 senior representatives from across the financial industry and social sector.

Entitled [Growing a Culture of Social Impact Investing in the UK](#), the report outlines key recommendations to help grow the number of social impact investors across the country and ensure financial providers help people support the issues they care about through their savings and investment choices.

The Advisory Group found there is a growing interest among individuals for their investments to have a positive impact on society, as well as produce financial returns. However the social impact investing market remains underdeveloped.

It urges the government and industry to support co-investment and increase the number of social impact investment opportunities in the market; strengthen competence and confidence within the financial services sector and make it easier for people to invest.

They also recommend that government and the social sector should look to increase reporting of the growth of the social impact investment market to give the financial services community a better understanding of the non-financial outcomes. The Advisory Group also underlined its commitment to building on their work to date to sustain momentum in developing the UK's social impact investment market.

The report has today been welcomed by Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, and Stephen Barclay, Economic Secretary to the Treasury,

Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

We want people to make investments that reflect their values and have a positive impact on the issues they care about. These recommendations are an important first step and I look forward to working closely with the industry to bringing social impact investment into the mainstream.

Stephen Barclay, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said:

Social impact investing has the power to make a positive change in

society, while also bringing positive financial returns. It's a win-win, which is why demand is growing. The market has enormous potential, but we need to make it easier for people to make a social impact investment. Today's recommendations will help make this possible.

Elizabeth Corley, vice-chair of the Advisory Group, added:

Our aim in undertaking this work was to broaden discussion and encourage wider debate around social impact investing to catalyse an increased focus on developing the market. The energy and ideas contributed by the members of the group demonstrate the degree of interest there is in moving social impact investing forward.

Drawing on the deep experience of our members, we have outlined a number of recommendations, allocated to specific market segments, that we believe will contribute to building a sustainable culture of social impact investing in the UK. Interest among individuals in seeing their savings and investments doing social and environmental good continues to grow and we hope this report and its recommendations will contribute to the work being done to keep the UK at the forefront of the social impact investing market.

[Speech: PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet 2017](#)

My Lord Mayor, My Late Lord Mayor, Your Grace, My Lord Chancellor, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Aldermen, Sheriffs, Chief Commoner, ladies and gentlemen.

As we meet here tonight, we are approaching a defining moment in the history of our nation and our place in the world.

It is a period of great change and it will, of course, have its challenges.

There will be ups and downs along the way. But I believe we should embrace this period with confidence and optimism.

Not grounded in some article of faith, but with a clear understanding of our strengths as a nation.

We are the fifth biggest economy in the world, the fifth largest exporter in the world and the top destination for inward investment in Europe. We have the second largest defence budget in NATO.

We are one of the only countries to deliver our promise to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income on international development. We have the extraordinary reach of our global brands from the Premier League to the BBC World Service; the thought leadership of our outstanding universities, the global finance of this great City of London – and the best of British business in demand the world over.

And perhaps above all we have that defining British spirit – and the fundamental values of fairness, justice and human rights – to use our influence in the world for good.

And these same capabilities and values that we bring to the task of leaving the European Union, we will also bring to the wider challenges facing the world today.

For we meet here at a moment when the international order as we know it – the rules based system that the United Kingdom helped to pioneer in the aftermath of the Second World War – is in danger of being eroded.

A moment when some states are actively destabilising the world order to their own ends, claiming that the rules and standards we have built, and the values on which they rest, no longer apply.

When regional instability is driving cross-border threats such as Islamist extremism and fuelling conflicts to which many ask whether the rules based order has an answer.

A moment when the failure to translate the success of global trade into growth that benefits everyone is weakening support for the free markets and open economies that have driven global prosperity for generations.

And when the rules of the game for this century are increasingly being shaped by emerging economies and powerhouses in the East.

So as we reach out into the world and write this new chapter in our national history, the task of a global Britain is clear.

To defend the rules based international order against irresponsible states that seek to erode it.

To support our partners in regions of instability in repelling the threats they face and to back their vision for societies and economies that will prosper in the future and play a positive role in the world.

To harness for a new generation the dynamism of open economies to deliver fair and equitable growth. And in doing so to build a new consensus in support of free markets and fair societies that may be the greatest long-term defence against division, tension and conflict.

These are the issues I want to address tonight: how government and business working together can secure the future prosperity and security of our nation – and play our part in doing so for the world at large.

Defending the global system

Our starting point must be to strengthen the commitment, purpose and unity of those allies and partners with whom we have built this order.

Central to this must be the enduring strength of our transatlantic partnership and our relationships with our European allies.

The role of the United States in shaping the global order is as vital now as it has ever been.

Of course we will not always agree on each and every course of action. But underpinning this relationship is an alliance of values and interests between our peoples which has been a force for good in the world for generations – and must continue to be so.

The same is true of our relations with our European partners as we leave the EU. For we remain a European nation – our history marked by shared experience, our societies shaped by common values, our economies interdependent, and our security indivisible.

As I said in my speech in Florence, the UK will remain unconditionally committed to maintaining Europe's security.

And the comprehensive new economic partnership we seek will underpin our shared commitment to open economies and free societies in the face of those who seek to undermine them.

Chief among those today, of course, is Russia.

In a recent speech President Putin said that while the interests of states do not always coincide, strategic gains cannot be made at the expense of others. When a state fails to observe universal rules of conduct and pursues its interests at any cost, it will provoke resistance and disputes will become unpredictable and dangerous.

I say to President Putin, I agree. But it is Russia's actions which threaten the international order on which we all depend.

I want to be clear about the scale and nature of these actions.

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea was the first time since the Second World War that one sovereign nation has forcibly taken territory from another in Europe. Since then, Russia has fomented conflict in the Donbas, repeatedly violated the national airspace of several European countries, and mounted a sustained campaign of cyber espionage and disruption. This has included meddling in elections, and hacking the Danish Ministry of Defence and the Bundestag, among many others.

It is seeking to weaponise information. Deploying its state-run media organisations to plant fake stories and photo-shopped images in an attempt to sow discord in the West and undermine our institutions.

So I have a very simple message for Russia.

We know what you are doing. And you will not succeed. Because you underestimate the resilience of our democracies, the enduring attraction of free and open societies, and the commitment of Western nations to the alliances that bind us.

The UK will do what is necessary to protect ourselves, and work with our allies to do likewise.

That is why we are driving reform of NATO so this vital alliance is better able to deter and counter hostile Russian activity. It is why we have stepped up our military and economic support to Ukraine.

It is why we are strengthening our cyber security and looking at how we tighten our financial regimes to ensure the profits of corruption cannot flow from Russia into the UK.

So we will take the necessary actions to counter Russian activity. But this is not where we want to be – and not the relationship with Russia we want.

We do not want to return to the Cold War, or to be in a state of perpetual confrontation.

So whilst we must beware, we also want to engage – which is why in the coming months the Foreign Secretary will be visiting Moscow.

For there is another way.

Many of us here looked at a post-Soviet Russia with hope.

Because we know that a strong and prosperous Russia which plays by the rules would be in the interests of the United Kingdom, Europe and the world.

As a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, Russia has the reach and the responsibility to play a vital role in promoting international stability.

Russia can, and I hope one day will, choose this different path.

But for as long as Russia does not, we will act together to protect our interests and the international order on which they depend.

Addressing regional instability

But the international order on which we depend faces other threats, including the challenge of regions where it is the absence of strong states that allows instability and conflict to threaten the global order.

And nowhere is this clearer than in the Middle East.

We see the spillover effects of this instability in the challenge of mass migration and humanitarian crises in countries like Yemen.

And we see it most starkly of all with the threat from Daesh and Islamist terrorism.

Britain is at the forefront of international efforts in the fight against this terrorism – from the battlefields in Syria and Iraq to tackling the ideologues who fuel the hatred of Islamist extremism. And we will defeat it.

But the conflicts we see in the Middle East are rooted in a complex mix of economics, demographics, history and sectarian tension.

In the past we have sought to remake countries or even entire regions at great cost to their people and ultimately to our own willingness to intervene when necessary.

Of course we must never be paralysed by the myth that armed intervention is doomed to fail. And the UK is not and will not be afraid to deploy its hard power where necessary.

Indeed this is happening around the world as I speak. From our world leading covert agencies to over a thousand troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, to our Royal Air Force operating in the skies over Syria and Iraq, and our Royal Navy patrolling the waters of the Gulf.

But as we look to the future it is the strength and stability of our partners that will define the trajectory of the region.

So if we are to achieve enduring stability in the Middle East, we must make an offer which supports both the long-term security and prosperity of our key partners, and encourages them to be champions of the global order.

As we are doing in countries from Saudi Arabia to Jordan, we will provide support to help them defend and protect their borders and their cities from external aggression – from terrorists to Iranian-backed proxies.

We will step up our efforts – together with our European and American allies – to help them not just contain, but solve conflicts in the region. From seeking political solutions in Yemen and Libya, to bolstering a united Iraq and working towards a two-state solution in the Middle East Peace Process.

As part of this, while we will stand firm in our support for the Iran nuclear deal, we are also determined to counter destabilising Iranian actions in the region and their ballistic missile proliferation, working with the US, France and Germany in particular.

And drawing on the full capability of government and private sector, we make a long-term commitment to work with our partners as they seek to reform their own economies: from Jordan as it deals with the challenge of refugees from Syria, and which I will be visiting again later this month, to countries across the Gulf undertaking social and economic transformation. For these reforms can present far-reaching opportunities for the people of the region and the wider world.

As part of these efforts, we will champion steps towards greater rights and

openness – insistent on the direction of travel, working with our partners in the region and recognising that each country must find its own path.

And this credible and coherent offer of support and partnership is a matter of urgency. As we see with the events of the last few weeks, from Lebanon to the GCC dispute, our partners see the threats they face as immediate and are straining for the means to tackle them.

So it is in all of our interests to get this right: to bring long-term, long-sought stability to the Middle East, ensure these growing economies can play their full role in the global system, and reinforce a rules-based international order.

Ensuring free markets work for everyone

And at the same time as dealing with threats to the global order from state and regional instability, we must also step up to the challenge of ensuring that free markets and open economies deliver fair and equitable growth for all.

As I argued at this Banquet last year, free market economies have delivered unprecedented levels of wealth and opportunity. But they are losing popular support because they are leaving far too many people behind.

The answer cannot be to turn our backs on the free market economy which – with the right rules and behaviours – is the greatest agent of collective human progress ever created.

For it is when countries make the transition from closed, restricted, centrally-planned economies to open, free market policies that we see life expectancy rise and infant mortality fall, incomes rise and poverty fall, access to education rise and illiteracy fall.

Indeed it is open, free market economies which are the only sustainable means of increasing the living standards of everyone in a country.

So our challenge is to ensure that is exactly what they do.

That is why, here in Britain, we are building a modern industrial strategy that will help to bring the benefits of our trade to every part of our country.

It is why we will act as a voice for free trade at the WTO. And also continue our efforts – including as I set out this year at the G20 – to reform the international trading system to ensure that trade is not just free but fair: fair between countries and fair for the poorest countries.

But as we all know global economic growth is increasingly being driven by emerging economies and powerhouses in the East.

And Africa's population growth means its significance will also only increase in the decades ahead.

So the West cannot write the rules of this century on its own. It is our partnership with the countries of Asia and Africa in particular that will define the course the world takes.

That is why I have asked the new International Development Secretary to build on the work of her predecessor by making one of her first priorities a review of how the whole of government, together with the private sector, can best support African aspirations for trade and growth.

It is why we will use our relationships with the Commonwealth, and the Summit here next year, to work with partners in Africa, Asia and beyond in building consensus and taking practical steps towards a global economy that works for everyone.

And it is why I am also clear that we will continue to increase our investment in Asia.

I am committed to maintaining the Golden Era of our relationship with China – not just as a vital trading partner but also as a fellow permanent member of the Security Council whose decisions together with ours will shape the world around us.

And I am committed to deepening our partnerships with countries across Asia, where I believe that Britain's global offer can have a hugely beneficial impact in ensuring that the region's potential is fully realised.

That includes tackling the problems in the region today – such as North Korea, where we have played a leading role in securing sanctions in response to the regime's outrageous proliferation of nuclear weapons.

And it includes continuing to step up our efforts to respond to the desperate plight of Rohingyas – brought home to us again on our TV screens so graphically today, with heart-breaking images of young children emaciated and pleading for help.

This is a major humanitarian crisis which looks like ethnic cleansing. And it is something for which the Burmese authorities – and especially the military – must take full responsibility.

The UK is already the largest donor in response to this crisis. And we will continue to play a leading role in bringing the international community together – working through the UN and with regional partners to do everything possible to stop this appalling and inhuman destruction of the Rohingya people.

And beyond the immediate challenges of today, we must also invest now in longer-term security partnerships in Asia, such as those which I have launched with Japan and India over the last year; and which we will look to develop further with countries across the region.

Role of business

Lord Mayor, as we look to the future, one of the biggest assets of a global Britain will be our soft power – and crucially that includes British business.

Where open markets thrive and the rule of law holds sway, British companies prosper. And they take in their DNA a way of doing business that brings not only commercial but wider benefits – of good governance, respect for the law, corporate and social responsibility.

So as a Global Britain makes its offer to the world, we are also offering the certainty and the confidence of the high standards you set, the framework of rules you follow, the values you live by and the ethos and culture you create.

You are the bearers of a certain idea of economic order upon which the last century of growth has been based – as I believe the next will be based.

So you have a vital role to play: to honour the great tradition of your livery companies by meeting that profound responsibility not just to do business – but to advance the values, rules and standards on which good business and global security and prosperity depend.

To champion the deepest trade links and open markets in Europe – and support a new economic partnership with the EU that will be in all of our interests to ensure Western strength.

To seek out and secure new markets from the Gulf to East Asia, driving growth and productivity at home, embodying British dynamism and expertise abroad, and giving proof to our firmly held faith in open markets and fair competition as the best route to lasting stability, security and prosperity.

And I am confident that you can do this.

For while our partners around the world want our support as a global power, they want something else too.

They want what you bring. They want expertise. They want reliable partners for the long-term. They want the legal services, the accountancy services and the finance in which this great City of London leads the world.

Because your engagement and your investments are the ultimate kitemark of confidence – a signal to the world that a country is a credible partner and open for business.

Conclusion

So Lord Mayor, these are challenging times. But I am confident that a global Britain has the ability and, indeed, the responsibility to rise to the moment.

To work together to secure the best possible Brexit deal; a deal that is not just good for Britain and good for the EU – but also strengthens the liberal values we hold dear.

And to work together to adapt and defend the rules based order on which our security and prosperity depends.

For this is fundamental to our success, to that of our partners and that of the world.

So let us step up to the task. And let us do so together – with the confidence and conviction of a truly global Britain.

Press release: Secretary of State announces advice on MLA pay

James Brokenshire has written to Trevor Reaney, requesting advice on MLA pay in the absence of an NI Executive and sitting Assembly.

The Secretary of State today announced that he has asked Trevor Reaney to provide him with advice on pay for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly in the absence of an Executive and sitting Assembly. The Secretary of State was speaking during the Second Reading of the Northern Ireland Budget Bill.

Mr Reaney, a former Clerk and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a current member of the National Assembly for Wales Remuneration Board, will provide this advice. The Secretary of State's letter sets out the scope of the requested advice.

News story: HCA response to Dispatches programme



The Homes and Communities Agency and the Regulator of Social Housing have issued statements in response to the Channel 4 Dispatches programme, 'The Great Housing Scandal', aired on Monday 13 November.

In relation to its investment functions:

As the Government's national housing delivery body, the Homes and Communities Agency plays a key role in ensuring more affordable homes are built, including for sub-market rent and shared ownership. We take any concerns raised about the HCA extremely seriously; however, the accusations made in tonight's Dispatches programme are based on a misunderstanding about our statutory responsibilities and role.

Our role is to get more homes built now and invest in increasing long-term housing supply. One of the ways in which we support housing associations and councils to meet different housing needs is a £4.7 billion capital grant fund to increase the number of homes for affordable rent or shared ownership. Since being established in 2008, we have supported a third of new homes built in England and we are currently transforming our business to further speed up housing delivery and make places better.

In appointing staff and board members with the necessary skills and experience it is inevitable that conflicts will arise. The HCA takes a robust approach to managing conflicts of interest, in line with guidance on Public Appointments and ensures that appropriate arrangements are put in place when they arise.

In relation to the Regulator of Social Housing:

The accusations made in the programme are based on a misunderstanding about the remit of the Regulator of Social Housing, which is discharged through an independent regulation committee. The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a well governed and financially viable social housing sector. It sets standards and intervenes where there is evidence of a breach that could lead to serious detriment to tenants. The Regulator is currently considering whether the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has

breached its standards taking account of the police investigation and public inquiry.

Landlords are responsible for dealing with their tenants' complaints. Since 2008, the Housing Ombudsman has been responsible for dealing with tenant complaints that are not resolved by social landlords. Nonetheless, where tenants directly approach or are referred to the Regulator (including where we have been contacted directly via social media), it will consider whether there has been a breach of its standards, and if so, whether there has been, or is, a risk of 'serious detriment'.

Further information

The HCA wrote to the production team to clarify some of the points that the programme was proposing to raise.

[HCA response – covering letter](#) (PDF, 168KB, 2 pages)

[HCA response – annex](#) (PDF, 155KB, 3 pages)

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Statement to Parliament: Secretary of State's Oral Statement on the NI Budget Bill

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Before I respond to the detail of this legislation, I do want to make some brief comments in relation to events yesterday. Yesterday people who are intent on killing and harming others left a small but lethal bomb in Omagh prior to Remembrance Sunday Commemorations. Their actions stand in stark contrast to those brave men and women that the community was gathering to honour. The men and women from all backgrounds who paid the ultimate sacrifice to all us all to live in a democracy.

I want to pay tribute to the work of the PSNI and others who dealt with that incident. And I think it underlines the continuing level of threat that we face, but, equally, what a repugnant, what an appalling act to take place on Remembrance Sunday when people were gathering to pay their respects in the

traditional way. And I am sure that all members on all sides of the House will condemn it utterly and if there is information that people may have about this incident then I would strongly urge them to do what they can and bring that to the attention of the Police Service of Northern Ireland so that it can be pursued with all rigour.

Madame Deputy Speaker, turning to the bill before the House this afternoon, as I set out to the House a fortnight ago, it is now nine months since there has been a properly functioning Executive and Assembly. Yet despite the tireless efforts over the last 11 weeks, the most recent phase of the Talks, the parties have not yet reached an agreement that would enable a sustainable Executive to be formed.

In bringing the parties together for this most recent phase of the political talks, I have sought to help both the DUP and Sinn Féin to bridge the gap on a small number of outstanding matters including on language and culture as well as on issues in relation to the continuing sustainability of the Executive.

In doing so, I have worked closely with the Irish Government in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach.

I remain prepared to bring forth legislation that would allow for an Executive to be formed should the parties reach an agreement.

My strong preference would be for a restored Executive in Northern Ireland to take forward its own Budget. So this measure is one that I am taking with the utmost reluctance and only because there is no other choice available. Let me be clear, the passage of legislation to set a budget should not be a barrier to negotiations continuing. But the ongoing lack of agreement has had tangible consequences for people and public services in Northern Ireland.

For without an Executive there has been no Budget. And without a Budget civil servants have been without political direction to take decisions on spending and public services in Northern Ireland. And, Madame Deputy Speaker, I would pay particular tribute to all those who have been engaged, in the Civil Service, in seeking to manage the current events. I would just finish this point: the Northern Ireland Civil Service have demonstrated, I believe, the utmost professionalism in protecting and preserving public services throughout these difficult times and I would certainly like to put on record my recognition of the work that they have been doing.

But the powers, as I have indicated, that they have been exercising have their limits. Under section 59 of the Northern Ireland Act, and section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001, the Northern Ireland Civil Service may only issue cash and resources equal to 95% of the totals authorised in the last financial year.

These powers do not allow departments to use accruing resources, meaning that the resources available to departments are in reality significantly less than 95% of the previous year's provision.

Honourable and right honourable members will recall that I set out in written statements in April and July an indicative Budget position and set of departmental allocations based on the advice of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. In my statement on the 17th of July, I said that "The exercise of section 59 powers cannot be sustained indefinitely" and warned that although we had not then reached that critical point, it was approaching.

Well, Madame Deputy Speaker, the resource limits in the absence of a Budget are now fast approaching. Without further action, by the end of November there are manifest risks that the NICS would simply begin to run out of resources.

That would mean no funding available for public services, with all of the negative impacts that would accompany such a cliff edge.

No Government could simply stand by and allow that to happen.

And that is why we need to take forward the Bill before the House today.

Necessity – good governance not Direct Rule

To be clear, Madame Deputy Speaker, this is a measure we have deferred for as long as was possible in relation to the Bill. We wanted the parties to reach an agreement and take a Budget through themselves.

In the absence of agreement, though, this Bill is necessary to keep public services running in Northern Ireland.

And while it is a Government Bill, it is not a UK Government Budget. It does not reflect the priorities or spending decisions of me or any other Minister.

Rather it sets out the departmental allocations and ambits that have been recommended by the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

And in turn they have sought as far as is possible to reflect the priorities of the previous Executive – albeit updated to reflect the changed circumstances as far as has been required.

In short, it is the Budget that a returning Executive – had one been formed – would have been presented with.

Taken as a whole, it represents a necessary measure, taken at the latest possible point, to secure public finances in Northern Ireland.

So Mr Speaker, we should be absolutely clear: passing this Budget in Westminster does not mean a move to direct rule, any more than did this Parliament legislating to set a Regional Rate in April.

Once the Budget is passed, the detailed decisions on how it is spent will be made by the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

And if – as I hope will be the case – the parties come together to form an Executive in the weeks ahead, those decisions would fall to them.

So there is nothing we are doing today that precludes talks from continuing, and an agreement being reached.

Contents of Bill

I therefore propose to turn briefly to the contents of this rather technical Bill.

In short, it authorises Northern Ireland departments and certain other bodies to incur expenditure and use resources for the financial year ending 31 March 2018.

Clause 1 authorises the issue of £16.17 billion out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland. The allocation levels for each Northern Ireland Department and the other bodies in receipt of these funds are set out in Schedule 1, which also states the purposes for which these funds are to be used.

Clause 2 permits some temporary borrowing powers for cash management purposes.

Clause 3 authorises the use of resources amounting to £18 billion in the year ending 31 March 2018 by the Northern Ireland departments and other bodies listed in clause 3(2).

These figures and those in Clause 1 supersede the allocations of cash and resources made by the permanent secretary of the Department of Finance up to the end of this month, under the powers I have already mentioned.

Similarly to Clause 1, the breakdown between these departments and bodies and the purposes for the authorised use of resources under Clause 3 is set out in the Bill – in the first two columns of Schedule 2.

Clause 4 sets limits on the accruing resources, including both operating and non-operating accruing resources in the current financial year.

These sums relate to those which have already been voted on by Parliament via Main Estimates, together with revenue generated locally within Northern Ireland.

There is no new money contained within this Bill: there is simply the explicit authority to spend in full the monies that have already been allocated.

This Bill would ordinarily have been taken through the Assembly and I recognise perhaps the imperfections and the nature in which we are having to do this in this House in a way that does not reflect the way in which the Assembly itself would have been able to consider this and take this forward. And that's for example why, in clause 5, there are a series of adaptations that ensure that – once approved by both Houses in Westminster – the Bill will effectively be treated as if it had been taken through the Assembly, enabling Northern Ireland's public finances to continue to function notwithstanding the absence of an Executive.

And Clause 6 repeals previous Assembly Budget Acts, relating to the financial years 2013-14 and 2014-15 respectively, which are no longer operative. Such repeals are regularly included in Assembly Budget Bills.

Scrutiny/accountability

But Perhaps I might add to the House at this point that, as the debate this evening has demonstrated, this is clearly an unusual Bill to be taken through this House, marking as it does an approval by Parliament of spending in the devolved sphere.

And while being proportionate, I want to ensure that in the absence of an Assembly there can be appropriate scrutiny by Parliament of how the money it has voted is subsequently spent.

In addition to the provision in the Bill for scrutiny by the Northern Ireland Audit Office of the Northern Ireland Departments, I will be writing to the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland asking him to send to me a copy of all of the NIAO audit and value for money reports that he produces after the Bill gains Royal Assent, which will contain his view on any shortcomings and his recommendations for improvement.

I will be asking the Northern Ireland Civil Service to make their responses to those reports available to me and copies of these reports and correspondence will be placed in the libraries of both Houses to allow scrutiny by all interested members and committees.

Estimates document

Alongside the Bill itself, Mr Speaker, I have also laid before the House as a Command Paper a set of Estimates for the departments and bodies covered by the Budget Bill.

These Estimates, which have been prepared by the Northern Ireland Department of Finance, set out the breakdown of their resource allocation in greater detail.

As Honourable and Right Honourable Members may note, this is a different process to that which we might ordinarily be seen for Estimates at Westminster, where the Estimates document precedes the formal Budget legislation, and is separately approved.

That would also be the case at the Assembly. But in these unusual circumstances, the Bill provides that the laying of the Command Paper takes the place of an Estimates document laid and approved before the Assembly, again to enable public finances to flow smoothly.

To aid the understanding of these Main Estimates and how the spending will breakdown, the Northern Ireland Civil Service has published a Budget Briefing paper, which was published on the Department of Finance website earlier today.

And it is also important to note, Madame Deputy Speaker, that the Northern

Ireland political parties have also been briefed on this budget detail.

£50m allocation

So that is everything the Bill, Madame Deputy Speaker, dealing with monies already voted for by Parliament, or raised within Northern Ireland.

These figures do not, though, deal with any other items. As the figures contained in the bill do not secure the financial position for the long-term, challenges remain.

There is a health service in significant need of transformation

There are further steps to take to build the truly connected infrastructure that can boost growth and prosperity throughout Northern Ireland.

And there are other steps too.

And it was in recognition of those unique circumstances that the UK Government was prepared to make available additional financial support earlier this year, following the Confidence and Supply Agreement between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party.

That Agreement made clear that we wanted to see that money made available to a restored Executive, which would decide on a cross-community basis how best to use the funding for the benefit of all in Northern Ireland.

But Northern Ireland's unique circumstances cannot simply be ignored in the meantime, especially given the pressure that we have seen in the continued absence of an Executive.

So separate from the Bill, Madame Deputy Speaker, this Government will commit to making available the £50m for addressing immediate health and education pressures in the Agreement in this financial year.

Those sums are not contained within this Bill, because they have not been voted on by Parliament.

If the Northern Ireland Administration confirm they wish to access them, they will be subject to the full authorisation of this House, as with all sums discharged from the UK Consolidated Fund, via the Estimates process in the new year.

From there they will be transferred, along with other sums forming part of the Northern Ireland block grant, into the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund.

In the absence of an Executive, it would be for the Northern Ireland Civil Service – bound by a range of equality and propriety duties – to make the decisions as to whether and how to take account of this funding for the benefit of the whole community.

But I say to the House: we want to see a restored Executive back in place and

deciding on how the additional financial support can best be used for the benefit of the whole community.

That remains the case now as much as ever. We believe as a party in devolution. We want to see locally elected politicians taking the strategic decisions about the future direction of their local areas.

MLA pay

In this context I know the disappointment that so many feel that despite the election more than eight months ago, there remains no functioning Assembly in which all those elected may serve.

And I know too that in turn many in Northern Ireland are concerned that full salaries continue to be paid to Assembly members despite the impasse.

I understand that concern. But I recognise too that in fact many of those elected have been desperate to serve since March, and have continued to provide valuable constituency functions in the meantime.

That is why I have been keen to seek independent advice on the subject in determining what actions may be appropriate.

I can say to the House this evening that Mr Trevor Reaney, a former Clerk of the Northern Ireland Assembly, has agreed to take on that task.

He will provide an independent assessment of the case for action and the steps he would consider to be appropriate, and will report back to me by 15 December.

This will not pre-judge any particular course of action, not least as further steps would require primary legislation.

But his advice will help inform the best way in which to proceed.

Conclusion

I very much hope that the points that I have outlined in relation to the recommendations or review that I will be receiving in relation to MLA pay will not be needed.

And that is because I still hope that the parties can resolve their differences and an Executive can be formed. An Executive that will come together and take the strategic decisions needed on health transformation, educational reform, building world class infrastructure – to deliver a better future in Northern Ireland.

That is what the people of Northern Ireland voted for and want to see. And we will continue to work with the parties and support them in their efforts to reach a resolution.

For together with the Irish Government, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the 1998 Belfast agreement and its successors and to the institutions they

established.

It remains firmly in the interests of Northern Ireland to see devolved government restored—to see locally elected politicians making decisions for the people of Northern Ireland on key local matters.

And Northern Ireland and its people need a properly functioning and inclusive devolved Government, along with effective structures for co-operation north-south and east-west.

But at the same time ultimately the Government are responsible for good governance in Northern Ireland and will do whatever is necessary to provide that.

This Bill is a reminder of that underlying obligation that we will continue to uphold. And I beg to move that it be read a second time.