

PM urges parties to restore power-sharing institutions on visit to Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland power sharing institutions must get back up and running so that they can start delivering on the issues that matter for the people of Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister will tell party leaders this week.

Delivering a “tough message” in private meetings on his first visit to Belfast since the Assembly elections, the Prime Minister is expected say that – while the UK government will “play its part to ensure political stability” – any action to fix the Protocol must result in all parties coming together to form an Executive and Assembly.

Drawing on his time as Mayor of London, he will say that there is “no substitute for strong local leadership”. Legislators must “get back to work” so that they can deal with the “bread and butter issues” like supporting families with the cost of living, cutting covid backlogs and fighting crime.

In his meetings with party leaders, the Prime Minister will also guarantee the delivery of three pre-existing commitments to Northern Ireland in the “coming weeks” including:

- Taking forward the Language and Culture Package agreed as part of the New Decade, New Approach.
- Intervening to deliver abortion regulations and place a duty on the Department of Health, so that women and girls have access to services that are their legal right.
- Introducing new measures to deal with the legacy of the past, with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland setting out more detail in the coming days and weeks.

The PM will update party leaders on the UK Government’s discussions with EU leaders over recent days, in which the EU have confirmed that they will never change their current negotiating mandate.

He will tell party leaders “that we will always keep the door open to genuine dialogue” however “there will be a necessity to act” and protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement if the EU does not change its position.

The PM will make clear that the government has never suggested scrapping the Protocol. There will always have to be a treaty governing the UK’s relationship with the EU in respect of Northern Ireland in order to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland and protect the integrity of the EU single market.

Instead, the Protocol needs to be reformed so that it delivers on its initial objectives to protect the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in all its

dimensions.

He will say that there is “no disguising the fact” that the delicate balance of the Agreement has been upset by the Protocol, because one strand of the Agreement (North-South) has taken precedent over another (East-West).

This undermines the text of the Agreement, which makes clear that all strands are of “interlocking and of equal importance”. It has eroded the historic economic bonds which link Great Britain and Northern Ireland and resulted in the Unionist community feeling like its aspirations and identity are threatened.

The UK and EU’s “shared objective” should be for a reformed Protocol to enjoy “the broadest possible cross-community support” when it faces a consent vote in 2024, he will say.