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John Kelpie
Chief Executive
Derry City & Strabane District Council
c/o Council Offices
98 Strand Road
Derry
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23rd September 2020

Dear Mr Kelpie,

Thank you for your recent correspondence to the Prime Minister dated 10 July 2020 setting out the recent Motions passed by Derry City and Strabane District Council on the issues of (1) higher education and City Deal funding, (2) Transition Period arrangements and (3) recent statistics by the Department of Communities on poverty in Northern Ireland and impact of Covid-19. This has been passed to me as the Minister of State for Northern Ireland.

Higher education and City Deal funding

On loan support being made available to new institutions in Derry, I understand that this request relates to a loan Ulster University has requested from the Department for the Economy to complete its Belfast campus. I would not be able to comment on this matter, as it relates to the responsibilities of that department.

The UK Government has committed £60 million to support the establishment of a new Graduate Entry Medical School in the North West. I am delighted by the progress that has been made, and that Ulster University has now started to recruit for its first intake of medical students. This is fantastic news for Derry and the North West and represents a significant investment in our health service.

On City Deals, we are committed to delivering a comprehensive and ambitious Derry City & Strabane Region City Deal to boost the economic potential of the region. Together with Inclusive Future Fund funding, this amounts to a UK Government commitment of £105 million for the North West, which has now been match-funded by the Executive. As council members have noted, the proposals for this funding include CIDRA and CARL, both of which aim to future proof NI for the fourth industrial revolution.

I enjoyed my recent trip to the city and our productive meeting, and I look forward to our continued engagement on delivering this deal for the region.

Transition period arrangements

The UK Government is clear that there will be no extension to the Transition Period, and this is enshrined in UK law. At the end of this year the Transition Period will be over and we will have recovered our economic and political independence on the basis of the agreement we reached in October. Extending would simply defer the moment at which we take charge of our own destiny, and would also prolong the negotiations and prolong business uncertainty.

We are taking steps to ensure that the Government is able to deliver on its commitments to the people of Northern Ireland, including commitments for maintaining and strengthening the integrity and smooth operation of our internal market. For instance, the UK Internal Market Bill, introduced in Parliament on 9 September, aims to ensure that the UK's own internal market operates effectively, strengthening Northern Ireland's place in the UK's customs territory and ensuring that the UK takes back control of its laws in an organised way after 31 December.

We are working closely with businesses as we implement the Protocol - they are at the heart of our approach. We set out further guidance on 7 August on what the Protocol means for moving goods into and out of Northern Ireland. The guidance underlines our commitment to unfettered access and to minimising burdens on business, and we will continue to help businesses prepare as negotiations with the EU continue and as preparations for the end of the Transition Period progress.

Recent statistics by the Department of Communities on poverty in Northern Ireland and Covid-19 impact

I am aware of the great efforts being made by the Council to support the people of Derry and Strabane through this crisis. Covid-19 has presented profound challenges for both public health and the economy, and has brought significant additional hardship to many of the most vulnerable in society.

Prior to Covid-19, the Government has prioritised greater financial security for low earners through the introduction of measures including the national living wage and incremental increases to the tax free personal allowance. In April, a further increase in the national living wage to £8.27 took effect.

The Government has supported the Executive in managing the economic impact of Covid-19 through UK-wide measures such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and changes to Universal Credit, as well as through a Barnett-based additional allocation to the Executive of at least £2.2 billion this year.

As other policy levers on welfare are devolved, I welcome the council's planned engagement with DfC.

Yours sincerely,

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

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