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## **Pivotal welcomes the Executive's return - but warns that it can't be more of the same**

*Pivotal, the independent think tank focused on Northern Ireland, welcomes progress towards the re-establishment of an Assembly and Executive to lead government. But the severity of problems they face in budgets and public services mean it can't be more of the same at Stormont.*

An effective Executive and Assembly are the best-placed institutions to govern Northern Ireland at a time it faces challenges which are urgent, significant and varied.

However, to provide the best possible leadership in these tough times, the Executive and Assembly need to work differently. The return of Stormont is good news but, to achieve the best outcomes for everyone in Northern Ireland, it cannot be more of the same.

*Pivotal will soon publish a briefing paper providing a fuller analysis of how the Executive needs to change, and some strategic ideas about how these changes can be brought about.*

**Speaking about the restoration of Stormont, Ann Watt, Director of Pivotal, said: "The return of the Executive is welcome news. However, it cannot work the same way it did before.**

**"Northern Ireland desperately needs a period of stable devolved government. There is a need to return to the spirit of leadership, cooperation and positive pragmatism which underpinned the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement."**

**"This is essential because the best path forward for everyone in Northern Ireland will require some very difficult decisions to be made by government – and for those decisions to be implemented properly.**

**"In the short term, the Executive needs to create and implement a plan to address immediate crises in many public services, agree pay settlements, and provide some interim stability.**

**"To make longer-term improvements, the Executive should agree a strategic plan and multi-year budget which will bring about real change**

**in the public services people experience. Good ideas won't be enough, they need to be followed through.**

**“The best way to help this happen would be through a detailed Programme for Government and multi-year budget, agreed between all the Executive parties before day-to-day work begins. This would provide strategic direction, and the basis for unity between different departments and ministers.**

**“This would give the Executive the best chance to create a united front, with politicians from different parties standing together to take on some of Northern Ireland's trickiest challenges – and make some of the difficult choices required.**

**“The reality is that – between stretched budgets, overdue decision-making and other outside pressures – there is no quick fix for all the issues facing the restored Assembly and Executive. However, there is the opportunity to choose some priorities and focus on certain areas which could bring big improvements to people's lives in areas like health waiting lists, health service transformation, schools budgets, improved infrastructure, addressing local poverty, agreeing a climate change action plan and more.**

**“Public services are stretched to the limit after almost two years without proper budgets or decision-making. Health waiting lists are too long, getting access to GP and Emergency Department services is too difficult, special educational needs provision is failing, and childcare provision has fallen far behind the rest of the UK. In too many areas, services are inadequate and fall far short of public expectations.**

**“The financial package offered by the UK Government is very welcome and will bring immediate relief and some short-term stability. However, careful management of both local services and public finances is required or problems will soon re-emerge.**

**“These are very difficult times for people across Northern Ireland and policy-makers will not have an easy job in the months and years ahead. However, if the right decisions are made and followed through with real commitment, the Executive can make a positive difference for people in their daily lives.**

**“Finally, Pivotal emphasises again the importance to Northern Ireland of a sustained period of stable government. All parties need to be alert to the risks to stability from ongoing political differences and the continued uncertainty created by the post-Brexit trading arrangements.”**

ENDS

## Notes to Editors

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1. Pivotal is an independent think tank launched in September 2019. Pivotal aims to help improve public policy in Northern Ireland
2. Pivotal's earlier reports are available [here](#)
3. Pivotal's Board of Trustees provides oversight of its work. They are David Gavaghan (Interim Chair); Richard Good; Sarah Creighton; Judith Gillespie; Jarlath Kearney; Sinéad McSweeney; Rosalind Skillen; Andrew McCormick; Seamus McAleavey; Alan Whysall.
4. Pivotal's Director Ann Watt is a former senior civil servant with 20 years' experience in public policy development and delivery. Most recently Ann was Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland (2014-2019)
5. Pivotal has received funding and in-kind support from Belfast Harbour Commissioners, The Community Foundation Northern Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, NICVA, Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University
6. For further information about Pivotal see [pivotalppf.org](http://pivotalppf.org) or contact Pivotal's Director Ann Watt on 07932 043835
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