

# **Protocol standoff denting Northern Ireland's reputation on a daily basis – business body**

The current stalemate at Stormont will inflict reputational damage on Northern Ireland's economy which will dent its ability to attract both investment and talent.

That is the message from one of the region's more influential business groups which pulled no punches in expressing its dissatisfaction at the failure to elect a speaker to the Stormont Assembly on Friday.

Paul Murnaghan, President of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, repeated calls from across the business world for Northern Ireland's political representatives to "stop allowing division to hold back progress and form a stable, fully functioning Assembly and Executive without delay".

His comments come after the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) refused to elect a speaker as Northern Ireland's newly elected MLA's gathered for the first time since last week's elections.

The move leaves the Assembly hamstrung, unable to function or carry out the day-to-day business of governing the province.

The DUP said it will stand in the way of the normal process of getting the Assembly back up and running in the wake of the election – both through its failure to elect a speaker and by refusing to elect a deputy first minister – until its concerns around the Northern Ireland Protocol are addressed by Westminster.

They believe the protocol, which effectively puts a border down the Irish Sea which demands customs and other checks on imports into Northern Ireland from Great Britain, threatens the union.

Their demands have been given credence by a recent escalation in rhetoric from Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to the European Union over the Protocol, who has threatened to rip up some parts of the protocol.

However, the impact of the current stalemate has not impressed businesses in the province.

“Failure to elect a Speaker to the Assembly at the earliest opportunity deals yet another blow to business and investor confidence in Northern Ireland,” Mr Murnaghan said. “At a time when our elected representatives should be getting straight to work to tackle a myriad of very significant challenges, we remain in limbo.”

“The uncomfortable truth is, while this continues, the reputational damage to Northern Ireland as a place to invest and work grows daily.”

He said the current stalemate is particularly damaging given it comes at a time when businesses and consumers are facing a myriad of challenges.

“For local businesses, little can be done to mitigate against the litany of challenges including soaring costs and skills shortages without a stable, functioning Executive and legislature.”