

## RHI report shows Stormont needs a change in culture, says think tank

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The findings from RHI inquiry reinforce the fact that the Executive, Assembly and civil service cannot go back to business as usual, according to independent think tank Pivotal.

Findings from the RHI Inquiry report show that Stormont needs a change of culture if it is going to succeed, says Northern Ireland's only independent think tank.

Last week Pivotal published a report *Good Government in Northern Ireland* which said that there can be no return to past ways of working.

The Inquiry found the government lacked the capacity to properly implement the RHI scheme, and that individuals and organisations at many levels shared responsibility for a "multiplicity of errors and omissions" as well as repeated missed opportunities to identify and correct flaws in the scheme.

Flaws that led to the runaway payments of RHI also played a role in the shortcomings of successive governments that oversaw an economy with long-term weaknesses, ever-increasing pressures in health and social care, a schools system with significant inequalities – and, of course, the three-year absence of Stormont.

However, fixing the issues associated with RHI is not enough to fix the weaknesses in how Stormont worked in the past. Last week Pivotal published *Good Government in Northern Ireland*, a paper exploring how the Executive, Assembly and civil service can learn from the past and improve in the future. The paper found that a big shift in culture is necessary, with much more emphasis put on good policy making, effective scrutiny, and transparency. If Stormont had paid more attention to these issues, some of the problems in RHI might have been avoided or corrected much earlier.

**Ann Watt, Director of Pivotal, said: "Pivotal welcomes the findings from the RHI Inquiry. This represents a major investigation that has shone a light on problems within the Executive, Assembly and civil service. It now provides an opportunity for positive change and, ultimately, a better future.**

**"The Inquiry's findings paint a picture of a government with shortcomings at many levels. Fixing the issues highlighted by RHI is imperative – but it is not enough to solve all Stormont's problems. In the past, government has suffered from a divided Executive with departments working in silos, inadequate scrutiny from the Assembly, and too many decisions taken behind closed doors. The result has been serious problems with public services, doubts about the competence of some officials, and allegations of unethical behaviour by some ministers and Special Advisors. RHI is a significant example of this.**

**“These findings, together with the fact the Assembly and Executive are now up and running, mean there is an opportunity for a new dawn and a successful Stormont that focuses on delivering results for all the people in Northern Ireland.**

**“Significant changes are necessary. As well as the recommendations from the RHI Inquiry, the Executive, Assembly and civil service now all need to work together. They must focus on making tough choices, planning for the long-term future of Northern Ireland, ensuring proper scrutiny of policy, and on working more openly and closely with both outside experts and the general public.**

**“If Stormont had worked this way before, the problems with RHI might have been corrected earlier or even avoided entirely.**

**“All this represents a major change from the past. If lessons are to be learned, including from RHI, a big culture shift is needed. The good news is that this is achievable with a recognition of the need for change.”**

ENDS

## Notes for Editors

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1. Pivotal's report *Good Government in Northern Ireland* can be found [here](#) .
2. Pivotal is an independent think tank launched in September 2019. Pivotal aims to help improve public policy in Northern Ireland.
3. Pivotal's first report *Moving Forward – putting Northern Ireland on track for the future* was published in November 2019. Its second report *Good Government in Northern Ireland* was published on 5 March 2020.
4. Pivotal's Board of Trustees provides oversight of its work. They are Peter Sheridan (Chair), Chief Executive of Cooperation Ireland; Lisa Faulkner Byrne, Project Coordinator, EPIC; Richard Good, public policy consultant; Olwen Lyner, Chief Executive, NIACRO; Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive, NICVA; and Alan Whysall, Honorary Senior Research Associate, Constitution Unit, University College London.
5. A wider Reference Group has helped steer the development of Pivotal and will provide ongoing guidance.
6. 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.
7. 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
8. For further information about Pivotal see [pivotalppf.org](http://pivotalppf.org) or contact Pivotal's Director Ann Watt on 07932 043835 .
9. Follow Pivotal on Twitter @pivotalppf .