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At the roundtable meeting on Thursday, we undertook to make available a written summary of our discussions with the parties, and our proposed way forward with the process in the New Year.

Through the recent trilateral meetings and bilateral contacts, we had the opportunity to meet all the parties represented at the roundtable. The outline agenda circulated at the last roundtable was referred to, but parties were free to address any part of it, and to add to it. The discussions had revealed a sense of urgency and engagement and a determination to build on common ground.

Most parties acknowledged that paramilitarism was a key issue that had to be addressed; some took the view that all other issues were subordinate, others that no one issue on the agenda should be elevated.

It was suggested that a useful working distinction could be made between confidence and implementation issues, though some matters would fall in both categories.

This is a review under paragraph 7 of the Review section of Agreement, but there were suggestions that certain "design issues" needed to be addressed, including Assembly voting arrangements and nomination procedures for NSMC and BIC meetings.

Some parties felt that subjects under the broad Agreement headings of Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity, and Economic, Social and Cultural Issues, needed to be addressed in detail, in the Implementation Group.

There was a widespread view that, without prejudice to questions of timing, issues involved in devolution of justice and policing needed to be addressed by the parties with a view to developing as much consensus as possible.

In the light of these views, we suggested that the Implementation Group might take forward issues under the rights/equality and economic/cultural

chapters. It might also look at Assembly voting arrangements, including proposals already made for changes to Standing Orders. There might also be some consideration of preparations for the paragraph 8 (4 Year) Review due to take place in the autumn.

We envisage that the Implementation Group would meet in working formation, chaired by the two Governments at Junior Ministerial level. We would aim for the first such meeting in or shortly after the week beginning 13 January.

As to certain key confidence issues - paramilitarism, policing and normalisation - we envisage them being discussed at the next roundtable later in January, starting with paramilitarism. The same roundtable meeting might also have an initial discussion of the principles involved in the devolution of policing and justice.

We made clear that there was significant work to be done on these key confidence issues in the New Year if we are to restore devolved institutions before the scheduled elections on 1 May.

We shall be in touch early in the New Year about exact timings.

**Brian Cowen**

**Paul Murphy**