



July 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about access to full abortion services in Northern Ireland. I am very concerned that women and girls are still unable to access high-quality abortion and post-abortion care in Northern Ireland. The law changed more than two years ago, and abortion services should now be available as a healthcare service in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

I welcome the Government's commitment that when establishing the legal framework for abortion that the services themselves would be delivered and overseen locally by the Department of Health and relevant health bodies in Northern Ireland, as a healthcare service. This is important as it will ensure that abortion services can be delivered in a sustainable way and become embedded into the health and social care system in Northern Ireland in the long term.

Regrettably, the Department of Health failed to commission and fund abortion services in line with the framework set out in the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020, despite being under a statutory obligation to do so since July 2021. The UK Government was left with no option but to commission services and ensure that funding is available to enable Health and Social Care Trusts to recruit and train staff to support the development of high-quality and sustainable services.

This is not a more liberal regime than that in England and Wales in practice. Although Northern Ireland has a different starting point to the rest of the UK given abortion was decriminalised through repeal of sections 58 and 59 Offences Against the Person Act, where appropriate, the Government has mirrored provisions under the Abortion Act 1967, to ensure consistency in provision of services across the UK.

Abortion does remain a devolved issue and the Assembly can of course legislate on this issue.



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Thank you for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY