



Department of Health & Social Care

From Baroness Merron
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Women's Health and Mental Health

39 Victoria Street
London
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02 January 2026

My Lords,

Windsor Framework matters raised during the Tobacco and Vapes Bill Committee Stage on 13 November 2025

Thank you for your contributions on 13 November during Committee stage of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill. I am writing to clarify the points raised about the Bill's compatibility with the Windsor Framework and the concerns regarding its impact on Northern Ireland's sovereignty.

The Government remains committed to implementing the Windsor Framework in good faith and to delivering its commitments in a way that best serves the people of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland benefits from a unique position, with full access to both UK and EU markets, offering businesses significant opportunities for growth and job creation. We continue to work constructively with all stakeholders - including the EU, the Northern Ireland Executive, political parties, businesses, and civic society - to achieve this.

As Noble Lords may be aware, Lord Murphy undertook an independent review of the Windsor Framework, assessing how it operates in practice and recommending practical steps to improve democratic scrutiny, business support, and cross-community confidence. On 04 September, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland provided a copy of the Lord Murphy report to both Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Review reflects the Government's commitment to securing the broadest possible confidence of communities in Northern Ireland. The Government is now considering Lord Murphy's recommendations and will provide a response before January 2026.

There has long been, and continues to be, significant public health alignment between the UK and the EU. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill represents the most substantial public health intervention in a generation - seeking to break the cycle of addiction and disadvantage and to put the UK on a path to becoming smoke-free. The EU has likewise committed to reducing tobacco-related harms and has set an ambition to achieve a tobacco-free generation by 2040 across member states.

As stated at Committee, the Government's position remains that the Tobacco and Vapes Bill will apply in Northern Ireland and is consistent with both our domestic and international obligations. Several Lords raised questions regarding the legal advice the Government has received on the Bill's compatibility with the Windsor Framework. The Government's practice is not to disclose whether legal advice has been sought or received.

Lord Dodds asked about the notification of certain Northern Ireland-related provisions of the Bill to the Technical Regulatory Information System (TRIS). TRIS notification is a routine

procedure required under the Windsor Framework, and, as I stated in Committee, it is not an approval process. We remain confident that the Bill will complete its passage within this parliamentary session.

Finally, I remind Noble Lords that the Northern Ireland Assembly granted legislative consent for the Tobacco and Vapes Bill on 10 February 2025. This is a significant achievement and reflects the continued UK-wide support for the Bill.

I hope this is helpful. I will deposit this letter in the libraries of both Houses.

All good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gillian".

BARONESS MERRON