

News story: Brokenshire: Round table talks paused

Mr Brokenshire commented:

The current phase of roundtable talks over the past ten days to help resolve issues will pause for Easter. Bilateral discussions between the parties and with the UK and Irish Governments will continue, in accordance with the three-stranded approach.

All the parties have been actively engaged and some further progress has been made, including on the formation of an Executive and on legacy. There is, however, still a lack of agreement between the parties on a small but significant number of issues. The restoration of devolved government remains achievable, but more time and a more focused engagement on the critical issues are required.

The parties will have a final opportunity after Easter to reach agreement, building on the discussions which have taken place over the past six weeks.

I said that I would use the period up to Easter to determine what legislation should be introduced into Parliament after Easter to address immediate requirements. I have already indicated that I will introduce legislation to set this year's regional rate to address the urgent need for rates bills to be issued by Councils. In addition, I believe it is also right to introduce provisions that would enable an Executive to be formed in early May should agreement be reached.

On 2 March the people of Northern Ireland voted clearly for devolved government. The parties mandated by that election still have a duty to provide the government for which they campaigned. I believe that the outstanding issues between the parties are surmountable, but if no Executive is formed by early May, I will need to take further steps to ensure Northern Ireland has the political stability it needs.

This is likely to mean, however undesirable, either a second

election or a return to decision making from Westminster.