

News story: Consultation launched on prescribing of gluten-free foods

The [consultation](#) follows NHS England's announcement this week of new guidance on the prescription of low value items such as travel vaccines, painkillers, and gluten-free (GF) foods.

It will consider ending the prescription of all gluten-free foods in primary care, with estimates suggesting this could save £25.7 million a year for the health service. An additional £10 million could be saved through patients no longer needing to attend GP appointments in order to get their gluten-free prescriptions.

Currently, staple gluten-free foods such as bread, flour and pasta are available on prescription to patients diagnosed with gluten sensitivity. Gluten-free foods have been given on prescription to these patients since the late 1960s when it was less easy to buy them. But gluten-free foods are now sold in many supermarkets and a wider range of naturally GF food types is also available.

Evidence from clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) has also shown that the NHS pays much more than the consumer for the same gluten-free products.

Health minister, Lord O'Shaughnessy said:

The NHS is one of the most efficient health services in the world, but we need to do more to ensure we get the best possible value for taxpayers' money. Changing the way we prescribe gluten-free food could make an important contribution to saving the NHS millions of pounds a year.

Many clinical commissioning groups have already stopped providing gluten free foods on prescription. Norwich and North Norfolk CCGs decided to end prescribing of GF foods, except in exceptional circumstances. Spend on gluten-free prescribing fell from £400,000 in 2015 to 2016, to just £21,000, making more money available for other treatments.

Norfolk CCG reported no negative feedback on the decision, with their patients saying they didn't have any problems accessing gluten-free foods since the ending of prescriptions. The decision in Norfolk was also well received by GPs, and by members of the public, who were often surprised to hear that gluten-free food had ever been available on NHS prescription.

Differing approaches to prescribing GF foods has created variation across CCGs. The consultation looks at a new, national approach, creating consistency in gluten-free prescribing across the country.

[Press release: Ordnance Survey sets out to enhance its aerial mapping technologies](#)

Ordnance Survey (OS) has signed an agreement with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), negotiated by its technology transfer arm, Ploughshare Innovations, to allow it to licence various forms of cutting edge aerial mapping technology.

The main technologies covered by the licence will enable the rapid processing, classification, analysis and extraction of geographic content from satellite and aerial images. The capability could facilitate the efficient production of new types of mapping content of the natural and man-made environments.

Paul Cruddace, OS Technical Change and Innovation Manager said:

We are always looking for opportunities to improve and increase our data capture and processing capabilities – creating new approaches to generating geospatial content. In accessing and applying technology of this nature, the hope is that it will allow us to further optimise our current operations as well as provide new capabilities and geospatial content to current and future customers.

It is a great opportunity to partner Dstl. For over two centuries, OS has continuously invested and innovated in new ways to map the environment. We are looking forward to exploring, trialling and hopefully adopting the latest innovations from Dstl and I am excited to see how they can enhance our processes and geospatial content to provide our customers with premier mapping services.

Ploughshare's CEO James Kirby added:

This is the latest contract that we have signed which supports the use of technologies developed by the defence and security sectors in other areas. The technology has the potential to improve the speed that maps can be prepared and to enhance their accuracy.

This licencing agreement will enable Ordnance Survey to assess the technologies initially, in order to determine the potential efficiency

benefits and enhancements they offer to gathering mapping data, prior to taking a full license.

News story: PM call with Prime Minister Rutte of the Netherlands: 30 March 2017

This evening the Prime Minister called Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte following yesterday's UK letter of notification to the European Council.

The Prime Minister underlined the UK's determination to agree a deep and special partnership between the UK and the European Union.

Both Prime Ministers agreed that the UK would remain a close and committed ally, and that they would approach the talks to come in a constructive manner.

News story: Bradford & Bingley asset sale to raise £11.8 billion for UK taxpayers

The loans will be sold to Prudential plc and to funds managed by Blackstone. There will be no changes to the terms and conditions of the loans sold. Borrowers do not need to take any action.

The price achieved reflects the strong credit quality of the portfolio and the outcome of a highly competitive sale process. It delivers value for money for the taxpayer and compares favourably with the 'fair value' of the B&B loan book disclosed in B&B's accounts last year. The fair value of the B&B loan book is less than its book value, reflecting the low interest rates payable on the loans.

UK Asset Resolution (UKAR) manages Bradford & Bingley and NRAM's closed loan books on behalf of the taxpayer. Allowing for today's transaction, UKAR's balance sheet now stands at £22 billion, down from £37 billion in September 2016 and from £116 billion in 2010.

Chancellor Philip Hammond said:

The sale of these Bradford & Bingley assets for £11.8 billion marks another major milestone in our plan to get taxpayers' money back following the financial crisis.

We are determined to return the financial assets we own to the private sector and today's sale is further proof of the confidence investors have in the UK economy.

At [Budget 2016](#), the government announced that it would explore a programme of sales designed to raise sufficient proceeds for Bradford & Bingley (B&B) to repay the £15.65 billion debt to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) and, in turn, the corresponding loan from the Treasury. Today's (31 March 2017) sale is the first in the programme.

The programme of sales is expected to conclude in full before the end of 2017-18. Any further sales will be subject to market conditions and ensuring value for money.

[Press release: Landmark day in devolution as powers pass to Welsh Assembly](#)

Today marks an important milestone in implementing the Wales Act 2017 with powers coming into force that pave the way for the introduction of Welsh Rates of Income Tax, enable the Welsh Government to invest more in infrastructure and allow the National Assembly to decide what to call itself.

These important powers put more decisions into the hands of the Assembly and the Welsh Government and give them important new levers to grow the Welsh economy and to deliver better public services across Wales.

The provisions which come into force today:

- Remove the requirement for a referendum before the Welsh Rates of Income Tax are introduced
- Increase the amount that Welsh Ministers can borrow to fund capital expenditure from £500m to £1bn
- Reaffirm the Assembly and Welsh Government as a permanent part of the UK's constitutional arrangements
- Enshrine the convention that Parliament will not normally legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the Assembly
- Allow the Welsh Government and UK Government to agree a protocol for managing water resources that flow between the two nations

The changes also mark the end of the Secretary of State for Wales' annual address to the Senedd on the Queen's Speech and his entitlement to take part in Assembly proceedings.

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, said:

Today marks the transfer of important new powers to the Assembly. These are powers which affect the lives of everyone living in Wales and are a major step towards the clearer, stronger and fairer devolution settlement that we are putting in place.

The Assembly and Welsh Government are, for the first time, formally recognised as permanent parts of the UK's constitutional fabric. There is no longer a need for a referendum before the Welsh Rates of Income Tax come on stream and Welsh Ministers will be able to borrow up to £1bn to invest in renewing Wales's infrastructure.

Devolution has developed significantly since 2010 and these powers mark the maturing of the Assembly into a fully fledged Parliament. From today, the Assembly can decide on a new title if that's what Assembly Members want. I and my successors will no longer be entitled to a seat in the Assembly nor will we be required to give an annual address to the Assembly on the Queen's Speech.

Together, these changes reflect the coming of age of the devolved institutions in Wales and mark the beginning of the transition to the new settlement that the Wales Act will put in place. I look forward to these powers being used to deliver for the people of Wales.

The measures come into force automatically two months after Royal Assent. The Wales Act 2017 gained Royal Assent on 31 January 2017.