

Press release: James Brokenshire statement: Northern Ireland talks update

Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said:

“While important progress has been made in discussions between the DUP and Sinn Fein towards the establishment of an Executive, it has not yet been possible for the parties to reach agreement.

“I am not therefore in a position to introduce the legislation necessary for an Executive to be formed this week though I must stress we are continuing to work with the parties as they proceed with ongoing talks.

“As I have outlined previously there are consequences to not being able to bring forward this legislation this week. It is responsibility of the parties to form an Executive to take forward its own Budget, but it is now very unlikely that an Executive will be in place within a timetable to pass a budget by the end of November, which is the point at which we and the Northern Ireland Civil Service assess that Northern Ireland will begin to run out of resources.

“No Government could simply stand by and allow that to happen.

“I am, therefore, now taking forward the necessary steps that would enable a Budget Bill to be introduced at Westminster at the appropriate moment in order to protect the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

“I would expect the Budget Bill to be considered in Parliament after the short November recess, but I will be returning to Westminster to update MPs.

“Subject of course to Parliamentary approval, the effect of this would be to give the Northern Ireland Civil Service certainty to plan for the rest of this financial year by giving the necessary legal authority to spend to existing plans.

“The Budget Bill will deal only with 2017-18 and would incorporate figures provided by the Northern Ireland Civil Service reflecting their assessment of the outgoing priorities of the previous Executive.

“I also want to be clear that passing a Budget in Westminster does not mean a move to direct rule ... any more than the passing of legislation to set a Regional Rate did in April.

“Let me be clear, this is not a barrier to continued political negotiations and the Government will continue to work with the Parties with that intent.

“And indeed, however unlikely, should an Executive be formed speedily enough and a means could be created to provide an exceptional procedure to enable

the budget to be passed by the end of November I would be prepared to withdraw the Budget Bill in order for Assembly to legislate for itself.

“I will also be seeking independent advice on what steps should be taken to reflect the current circumstances in MLA pay.

“The Government remains steadfast in our commitment to the 1998 Belfast Agreement and its successors and to the institutions that they establish.

“I therefore urge the parties to resolve their outstanding differences to see the restoration of devolved government quickly.

“Together with the Irish government, in accordance with the three stranded approach, we will continue to work with them and support them in their efforts.

“But in the end it is only the parties themselves that can reach that agreement.

“It remains firmly in the interests of Northern Ireland to see devolved government restored, to see locally elected politicians making decisions for the people of Northern Ireland.

“With goodwill and compromise on all sides the parties can still achieve this and it is what needs to happen.”

Press release: Number of children in long-term workless households at lowest level in a decade

There are over half a million fewer children living in long-term workless households since 2010. The number of children in lone parent households that are long-term workless has fallen 349,000 since 2010.

The number of children in long-term workless households has fallen to its lowest level in a decade, according to new statistics out today (1 November 2017). This is down 505,000 since 2010.

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that 9.3% of children, around 1.1 million, are in long-term workless households. This is the first time in at least a decade that the percentage figure has fallen below 10%.

The number of children living in lone parent households which are long-term workless has fallen 73,000 on the year. Around 9 in 10 children live in households with at least one working adult.

Minister for Employment, Damian Hinds said:

With more than 3 million people in work since 2010, we're giving people the chance to find work and to achieve a regular household income.

We know that children growing up in working households do better in school and are more likely to be in work in adult life.

We will continue to build on this success and break the cycle of worklessness. At the heart of our welfare reforms is the goal to help people improve their lives.

More than 17.6 million households have at least one working adult. Less than 15% of households are classed as workless, with the number having fallen by 89,000 since last year.

Recent employment figures show that there are a near-record 32.1 million people in work, and the unemployment rate (4.3%) is the lowest since 1975.

Estimates for overall workless households are taken from the Office for National Statistics ['Working and Workless Households in the UK: April to June 2017'](#), published in August.

Children who grow up in workless families are almost twice as likely as children in working families to not reach the expected attainment level at all stages of their education – research has shown that three-quarters of children in workless families fail to reach 5 full GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and maths.

Compared to children from working families, those from workless families are also more likely to be workless in adult life. The [Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#) policy paper includes research on the impact of children being in a working household.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5144

Follow DWP on:

[News story: Civil news: funding in international child rights of access cases](#)

New guidance is available to help you with funding applications concerning

international disputes about rights access to a child.

The new 'Quick Guide' is available online on the CCMS training website. It will help you with the application process.

This is for non-means/non-merits tested applications in relation to article 21 of the 1980 Hague Convention. Here are 3 of the most important points highlighted in the new guidance:

Document upload

Remember to use the document upload facility to attach a copy of the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU) letter before submitting the application.

Substantive applications only

The application can only be submitted as a substantive application. No work can be carried out until the certificate has been granted.

Urgent applications

In urgent cases, applications can be prioritised. If you would like to request an urgent consideration of your application for an article 21 case, you can notify the Legal Aid Agency of the urgency.

You can do this by emailing:

Peter.Reed@legalaid.gsi.gov.uk

Stephen.Spittlehouse@legalaid.gsi.gov.uk

Pamela.Read@legalaid.gsi.gov.uk

Further information

[CCMS training website](#) – see 'Article 21 1980 Hague Convention Applications' under 'making an initial application'.

[Press release: Government action to end letting agent fees](#)

A new draft bill will be introduced to Parliament today (1 November 2017) to ban letting fees.

The [draft Tenant Fees Bill](#) will set out the government's approach to banning letting fees for tenants, helping millions of renters by bringing an end to

costly upfront payments.

Evidence shows the level of fees charged are often not clearly or consistently explained, leaving many tenants unaware of the true costs of renting a property.

This latest action will help improve transparency, affordability and competition in the private rental market. It will also prevent agents from double charging both tenants and landlords for the same services.

Today the government has also launched a [consultation](#) on making membership of client money protection schemes mandatory for letting and managing agents that handle client money.

These schemes ensure greater financial protection for landlords and tenants, giving them complete confidence that their money is safe when it is with their agent and they can be compensated if all or part of their money is not repaid.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This government is determined to make sure the housing market works for everyone. Tenants should no longer be hit by surprise fees they may struggle to afford and should only be required to pay their rent alongside a refundable deposit.

We're delivering on our promise to ban letting agent fees, alongside other measures to make renting fairer and increase protection for renters.

As part of wider plans to improve the rental market, government has already introduced measures that crack down on the small minority of rogue landlords that shirk their responsibilities. Earlier this year, the law was changed to allow councils to impose new fines of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution for a range of housing offences.

The draft Tenant Fees Bill, which reflects [responses from a public consultation](#) also published today, will:

- Cap holding deposits at no more than one week's rent and security deposits at no more than 6 weeks' rent. The draft bill also sets out the proposed requirements on landlords and agents to return a holding deposit to a tenant.
- Create a civil offence with a fine of £5,000 for an initial breach of the ban on letting agent fees and creating a criminal offence where a person has been fined or convicted of the same offence within the last 5 years. Civil penalties of up to £30,000 can be issued as an alternative to prosecution.

- Require Trading Standards to enforce the ban and to make provision for tenants to be able to recover unlawfully charged fees.
- Appoint a lead enforcement authority in the lettings sector.
- Amend the [Consumer Rights Act 2015](#) to specify that the letting agent transparency requirements should apply to property portals such as Rightmove and Zoopla.

More than 9 out of 10 tenants who responded to the government consultation backed the action to ban letting agent fees, with 7 out of 10 of them saying these fees affected their ability to move into a new rented property.

Overall more than 4,700 responses to the consultation were received from a range of individuals and representative bodies from across the sector.

The government's [housing white paper](#) sets out measures to build the homes Britain needs now and to give those that rent a fairer deal. It puts tackling the high cost of renting at the heart of its plan to fix the broken housing market.

The new measures set out in the draft bill are now subject to Parliamentary scrutiny before they can be introduced into law.

All proposals relate to England only. The ban on letting fees will apply to assured shorthold tenancies and licences to occupy in the private rented sector.

The consultation on making membership of a Client Money Protection Scheme mandatory for letting and managing agent will help to ensure that all tenants and landlords have the financial protections they deserve.

Client money protection schemes give landlords and tenants confidence that their money is safe when it is with their agent, it also means that when things do go wrong – both tenants and landlords will be compensated if all or part of their money is not repaid.

The [consultation](#) will run for 6 weeks from 1 November 2017.

Read the [government response to the consultation on banning letting agent fees](#).

[Press release: Calstock residents](#)

urged to have say on flood alleviation plan

The current embankment by the River Tamar which protects Calstock from flooding is in poor condition and needs replacing.

The Environment Agency is holding a public drop-in session at Calstock next week to explain how potential works could reduce flood risk to local homes and businesses, and benefit the environment.

The Environment Agency is keen to learn from local people who are invited to attend to share their views to help shape our proposals.

Dan Boswell of the Environment Agency said:

The existing flood defence embankment in Calstock protects property and community assets but is in poor condition and unsustainable in its current position. By moving it inland it can be maintained to a better standard to increase its effectiveness at reducing flood risk and allow the creation of inter-tidal habitat to help offset the impacts of rising sea levels on wildlife.

Local knowledge and experience about the flood risk from the residents of Calstock is important to help us design a scheme that people who live and work in the community support to shape the future management of flood risk in their community.

The Environment Agency is seeking to work with local partners to ensure its work delivers as many benefits as possible to the community. This includes:

- managing flood risk to the community, and the impacts of climate change
- protecting the environment and visual landscape of Calstock and the Tamar Valley as an important recreational amenity
- enhancing the environment by attracting additional wildlife to the improved local habitat on land reconnected to the river

The drop-in session for people to learn more and share ideas will take place in the Kelly Room of Calstock Arts on Wednesday 8 November 2017, from 3pm to 8pm.