

Press release: Political talks update by Secretary of State

James Brokenshire delivered a short statement to reporters outside Stormont House, Belfast on Friday 24 March

Good morning everyone.

We're now entering the final few days available to the political parties here in Northern Ireland to form an Executive. I've had constructive discussions over the last two and a bit weeks with the Irish government and with political parties.

There are a number of issues where I see common ground and where I firmly believe that resolution can be achieved.

But there are other issues that still remain to be resolved in order for an Executive to be formed on Monday. We also have a duty to survivors and victims to come forward with proposals to deal with the past.

I believe that a deal is still achievable – with good will, good spirit and that positive intent.

But time is short.

And we must firmly focus on those key issues to enable an Executive to be formed on Monday. It is that task of work that we are firmly engaged in.

I'll be working intensively in the coming days to achieve that positive outcome, to see inclusive devolved government restored here in Northern Ireland, that responsibility that we all feel in that regard.

And it is with that intent that we start meetings this morning and I will now head to Stormont Castle.

Thank you very much.

Welsh Government seeks innovative ideas to tackle childhood obesity with healthier & cheaper food choices

By the age of 11, more than 40% of Welsh children are either obese or

overweight. Research shows that the vast majority of obese children tend to grow up to become obese adults.

Obesity has a significant impact on the economy. In 2011, obesity alone was estimated to cost the NHS in Wales £73 million, with between £1.40 million and £1.65 million spent each week treating diseases resulting from obesity.

Companies are being invited to submit solutions which focus on reducing levels of salt, sugar and saturated fat as well as increasing the levels of vitamins, minerals and fibre provided in food and drink for children.

Schools have a key role to play in providing children with access to nutritious and healthy food and Welsh Government is also inviting applications which further improve the nutritional value of school meals, while reducing the cost to ensure families are able to afford this option.

The competition was launched at Wales' first major food event, Blas Cymru/Taste Wales. The Welsh Government organised event brought together representatives from across Wales' food and drink industry with influential buyers from all over the world.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, said:

“This programme is a call to our food innovators in Wales to help us improve the health of our children by providing good quality and nourishing food, whilst keeping costs down. The Welsh food and drink industry can be proud of its record in innovation, in launching new products and driving up standards, and I'm now appealing to you to use your skills, talents and creativity, to tackle one of the greatest challenges of all – improving the diets of our children today, to enable them to become the healthy young adults of tomorrow.”

Those who submit ideas for funding will come up with innovative solutions such as new processing technologies, reformulation techniques, enabling technologies, new engineering designs and flexible manufacturing processes, to drive down costs.

In addition to improving the diet of children it's expected that the programme will have wider benefits, including, providing financial savings for schools, boosting the food industry in Wales and further enhancing its reputation for research and innovation.

The funding is provided through the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI), from the Welsh Government and Innovative UK.

Press release: Change of British High Commissioner to South Africa

2014 – 2016 Private Secretary to the Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs 2011 – 2013 Sarajevo, Her Majesty's Ambassador 2009 – 2011 New Delhi, Deputy High Commissioner 2007 – 2009 New Delhi, Political Counsellor 2006 – 2007 FCO, Head, Iraq Policy Unit 2003 – 2006 Moscow, Head, External Section 2002 Full-time Russian language training 2001 FCO, Head, G8 & OECD Section, Economic Policy Department 1999 – 2000 FCO, Head, Nuclear & Missile Defence Section, Security Policy Department 1996 – 1998 Washington, Private Secretary to HM Ambassador 1993 – 1995 Johannesburg, Vice-Consul (Political/Aid/Press) 1991 – 1993 FCO, Desk Officer, Hungary and Bulgaria 1991 Joined Foreign and Commonwealth Office

News story: Civil news: replacement contract schedules begin 1 April 2017

We will soon be issuing new civil contract schedules beginning on 1 April 2017.

These will replace the following schedules which are ending on 31 March 2017:

1. 2010 Standard Civil Contract (mediation)
2. 2013 Standard Civil Contract (family, housing and debt, immigration and asylum)
3. 2013 Standard Civil Contract (welfare benefits)
4. 2015 Standard Civil Contract (actions against the police etc, public law and clinical negligence)
5. 2016 Standard Civil Contract (welfare benefits)
6. Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS) exclusive schedules
7. Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) exclusive schedules

Most of these schedules will run for 12 months and end on 31 March 2018. The only exceptions are the HPCDS and IRC schedules, which will continue to be issued for 6 months. Where to find new schedules

You will be able to view schedules in Contracted Work and Administration (CWA) from 31 March 2017. But HPCDS and IRC schedules will be emailed to you directly and will not be uploaded into CWA.

Reporting work

Work completed in April can be reported from 1 May 2017.

Matter start allocations

In most cases, matter starts will be allocated in accordance with paragraph 1.24-1.27 of the relevant contract specification.

This means matter start allocations will be calculated on the basis that providers receive 100% of the matters that they reported in the previous schedule period.

The only exception is where providers reported 80% or less of their previous allocation. In these circumstances, provider will receive 80% of their previous allocation.

Separate matter start allocations

There are a few instances where a separate allocation approaches will apply. These are outlined here:

Contract	Allocation
2010 Standard Civil Contract (mediation)	50 matter starts
2013 standard civil contract (welfare benefits)	The standard number of matter starts for the relevant procurement area
2016 standard civil contract (welfare benefits)	30 matter starts
HPCDS and IRC exclusive schedules	The same allocation as in the previous schedule, subject to any changes resulting from court closures affecting some HPCDS

Where providers have the power to self-grant a further 50% matter starts they may do so in addition to the amount specified in the schedule. Where a provider does not have the power to self-grant, they can request up to an additional 50% of matter starts from their contract manager.

2014 Standard Civil Contract (mental health and community care)

Current schedules under the 2014 Standard Civil Contract (mental health and community care) end on 31 July 2017. So, new schedules under this contract will be issued in July to cover the period 1 August 2017 to 31 March 2018.

Contract end date

Civil legal aid contracts will end on 31 March 2018. The procurement process for new civil legal aid contracts will begin in May 2017.

[News story: Civil/crime news: eligibility for legal aid and universal credit](#)

Ministry of Justice consultation on proposals to amend legal aid financial eligibility system to accommodate expansion of universal credit.

A consultation called 'Legal aid financial eligibility and universal credit' is now open and the deadline for responses is 11 May 2017.

The proposals seek to amend the legal aid financial eligibility system to accommodate the expansion of universal credit.

The intention behind the government's proposals is to limit any additional burden on the legal aid budget rather than cutting costs.

Targeted approach

This would be done by having means testing arrangements that ensure the limited funds available are targeted at those clients most in need.

The consultation proposals also seek to ensure that clients contribute to the costs of their legal advice and representation where they are able to do so.

All providers and interested parties can join in the consultation process by using the link below. This also offers the opportunity to find out more about the proposals.

Further information

[Legal aid eligibility and universal credit consultation](#)