

# Press release: Secretary of State welcomes Independent Reporting Commission report on tackling paramilitary activity



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I want to record my sincere thanks to the Independent Reporting Commission for their first substantive report on tackling paramilitary activity. It is deeply regrettable that in 2018, tackling paramilitary activity still remains a critical issue for Northern Ireland, not least at this current political impasse.

This is a significant report which benchmarks the progress which has been achieved to date but reminds us of the continued and challenging work still to be done to ensure that communities are free from the threat of paramilitarism. The IRC has acknowledged the good work carried out to date, but they too have pointed to the challenges of dealing with this issue in the absence of a functioning Executive. That is why I remain resolute in finding a way forward to get devolved government up and running again as quickly as possible in order to that the Commission will see further progress in the coming year.

Paramilitarism is a scourge on our society. It was never justified in the past, it cannot be justified today and these groups should have no place in our society. We must all continue to work together to keep communities safe and free from these totally unacceptable attacks.

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## **News story: Faster access to treatment**

## and new technology for 500,000 patients

Patients could benefit from faster access to treatment under 2 new programmes. The programmes will identify innovative technologies and treatments then speed up their uptake across the NHS.

£7 million in funding has been announced for 'Test Bed' projects across England that will help improve patient outcomes and the way NHS staff work.

The Test Beds programme is a joint programme between NHS England and government. It sees the NHS working with innovators using technology to address some of the biggest challenges in health and care.

The second wave of the Test Beds programme will take place in 7 locations across the country. Projects being tested include:

- the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to deliver a more accurate and efficient breast cancer screening
- a new digital platform to help people to manage diabetes
- the combination of 3 new digital technologies to help reduce A&E admissions for patients with chronic long-term heart failure

A further £2 million will be available for 'rapid uptake' products. These are 7 proven innovative technologies that help to improve patients' lives.

The 'rapid uptake' products include a range of treatments for conditions such as cancer, heart disease and multiple sclerosis.

The focus is on overcoming barriers to make their use across the NHS more widespread. Supporting these products will help 500,000 patients to access new treatments and save the NHS £30 million.

Through the [Accelerated Access Collaborative](#) (AAC), leaders in the health system have identified these products so that UK patients benefit from the world-class health innovations developed in this country first.

The investment also supports the ambition of the government's modern industrial strategy to make Britain the best place in the world for innovators, including new treatments to help people live longer, healthier and happier lives through the [Life Sciences Sector Deal](#).

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock said:

The UK is a world leader in medical and health research and we want to make sure patients are the first to benefit from the tech revolution happening across the NHS.

Every day, innovative new treatments are demonstrating the power technology has to save lives – and I want to make these opportunities available across the whole NHS.

These programmes will fast track innovations from lab bench to patient bedside and help ensure that NHS patients continue to be the first to benefit from the life-changing treatments developed in this country.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

From the first vaccine to the first blood transfusion, the UK has an unmatched reputation in medical research and innovation.

This collaboration will rapidly bring life-saving products into real world clinical settings. Our modern industrial strategy builds on our unique strengths and heritage in medical research and innovation, not only creating new products and jobs but ensuring NHS patients are at the forefront of these technological advances.

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## **[News story: Fortifying flour with folic acid: government to consult](#)**

Public Health Minister Steve Brine has announced that the government will consult on the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid to prevent fetal abnormalities.

The consultation will launch in early 2019 to consider the evidence around folic acid fortification as well as the practicality and safety.

Evidence from the Scientific Advisory Committee of Nutrition (SACN) suggests that expectant mothers can take folic acid during pregnancy to significantly reduce the risk of foetal abnormalities including:

- spina bifida – where the membranes around the spine do not close properly and in some cases affect walking or mobility
- anencephaly – where the majority of the brain never develops

Approximately 700 to 900 pregnancies are affected by neural tube defects each year in the UK.

Women who are trying to become pregnant are advised to take a daily supplement of 400 micrograms of folic acid before they conceive and during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, around half of pregnancies in the UK are unplanned, so many women are missing out on these nutrients early in their pregnancy.

The plans to fortify flour with folic acid are thought to be an effective way of reaching those with the lowest folate intakes – for example younger women from the most deprived backgrounds.

The consultation will also consider if there are any risks to other members of the general public. These include whether additional folic acid in the diet will mask the diagnosis of conditions such as pernicious anaemia, which is a deficiency in the production of red blood cell.

The proposal already has the support of the UK Chief Medical Officers and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (the independent body that provides scientific advice on diet and nutrition to the UK governments).

Steve Brine, Public Health Minister, said:

All women should be able to access the nutrients they need for a healthy pregnancy and in turn, reduce the risk of devastating complications.

We have been listening closely to experts, health charities and medical professionals and we have agreed that now is the right time to explore whether fortification in flour is the right approach for the UK. My priority is to make sure that if introduced, we are certain it is safe and beneficial for all.

Chief Medical Officer Professor Dame Sally Davies said:

The evidence shows that fortifying flour with folic acid is a practical way of reducing folate deficiencies in pregnant women and reducing birth defects.

However, as with any intervention of this kind, we need to be certain it is also safe, and that means considering what the wider implications would be for the rest of the population who eat flour.

I am pleased to see the government taking action on this issue and hope to see the wider scientific community feed in their views to this important consultation which could benefit and improve the lives of many women and babies in this country.

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# [News story: Sellafield plant to be celebrated in new exhibition](#)

It will celebrate the plant's immense contribution to the global nuclear industry.

Running at the Beacon Museum, Whitehaven, from 16 November, it features works by artists from the UK and Japan.

Thorp began operations in 1994. It reprocessed (or recycled) spent nuclear fuel from 34 plants around the world. It is one of only two commercial [reprocessing](#) sites in existence.

Its switch-off next month is a key step in the transformation of Sellafield Ltd from nuclear operator to environmental restoration business.

Thorp has reprocessed spent nuclear fuel from 34 plants around the world.

The exhibition features sculptures, relief printing, collages, textural canvases, paintings, and sketches.

Each piece has been individually commissioned to convey a moment in the life of the plant.

Jamie Reed, Sellafield Ltd's head of development and community relations, said:

The end of reprocessing at Thorp is one of the most important events in Sellafield's history.

After the closure of Calder Hall, it's the biggest change to our site in the 21st century.

The plant has made a huge contribution to west Cumbria in terms of jobs, skills, pride, and prestige.

The Art of Reprocessing will celebrate its unique achievements and the people who made it possible.

Hollie Morton-O'fee, an art and design student at Egremont's West Lakes Academy sixth has created a lab coat textile piece for the exhibition.

Taiwanese-born illustrator Chiyun Yeh, who lives in Tokyo, has used her work to explore the relationship between the UK and Japan.

The Art of Reprocessing opens with a VIP preview event on Friday, 16 November.

It will be open to the public from Saturday, 17 November to early January

2019. A smaller version of the exhibition will stay open until March 2019.

Copeland residents can visit for free with the Copeland Pass. To register, take proof of residence to the Beacon admissions desk.