

Government backs UK firm to build three hospitals in Oman

- UK firm wins contract for the construction of the Salalah, Suwaiq and Khasab hospitals, backed by over £500 million worth of support from UK Export Finance (UKEF).
- Three hospitals to provide intensive care, emergency services and specialist baby care.
- International Hospitals Group (IHG) will draw on world-renowned expertise and equipment from the UK supply chain for all three projects.

[International Hospitals Group](#) has its UK headquarters in Denham, Buckinghamshire and partners with the University of Cambridge, the United Nations and the World Bank to provide health care projects all over the world.

UKEF has provided support to help win these major contracts in Oman, and provided a loan, repayable on a commercial basis.

The new projects will support jobs in the UK throughout the duration of the build, by drawing heavily on the expertise of the UK supply chain, including the supply of specialist knowledge and medical equipment.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss, said:

The size of this contract demonstrates the appetite for the UK's world leading healthcare expertise across the globe.

I am delighted UK Export Finance is supporting the construction of these three hospitals which will not only improve healthcare provision in Oman but will also expand IHG's overseas business.

IHG will provide a full design, construction and services package for all three hospitals. Work will also include the construction of emergency power systems, maintenance facilities, roads and other associated infrastructure.

An International Hospitals Group spokesperson said:

International Hospitals Group is most grateful that UK Export Finance is supporting the development of these three hospitals, which will enhance the provision of healthcare services in the Sultanate of Oman.

UK Export Finance is the [UK's export credit agency](#) and a government department, working alongside the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations.

It exists to ensure that no viable UK export lacks for finance or insurance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and ensure they get paid for export contracts.

Sectors in which UKEF has supported exports include: infrastructure, aerospace, healthcare, telecommunications, transport and industrial development.

UKEF has a regional network of 24 [export finance managers](#), who support UK businesses export their goods and services.

UKEF support exporters with a range of products that include:

- Bond insurance policy
- Bond support scheme
- Buyer & supplier credit financing facility
- Direct lending facility
- Export insurance policy
- Export refinancing facility
- Export working capital scheme
- Letter of credit guarantee scheme

The latest information on UKEF's country cover positions can be [found here](#).

If you're a business owner and want to learn more about how UKEF could help you, [tell us about your business](#).

[Microchipping your pet is the best New Year's resolution you could make](#)

The government and leading animal welfare charities are urging pet owners to microchip their cats and dogs this New Year, to give them the best chance at being reunited if their pet gets lost or strays.

Microchipping pets, and ensuring the data is kept up to date, is a vital part of being a responsible pet owner. Thousands of cats and dogs end up in rehoming centres every year and a microchip offers the best chance of identifying lost pets quickly and safely.

Since compulsory dog microchipping was introduced in 2016, [92% of dogs are now microchipped](#). Furthermore, data from Dogs Trust has shown [a 15 percentage point decrease in dogs handled by local authorities since the change in the law](#) as microchips allow them to be scanned and safely reunited with their owners before they formally become a stray dog.

While microchipping is a legal requirement for dogs, it is not currently

mandatory for cats, unless they are travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme. Cats Protection reported that 8 out of 10 stray cats handed in to their adoption centres in England during 2018 were unchipped.

This government has always urged cat owners to microchip their pets as the right thing to do as responsible pet owners and is now taking steps to introduce compulsory cat microchipping to give pet owners peace of mind, help tackle cat theft and identify cats injured or killed on roads.

As the first step, in October, the Environment Secretary [launched a call for evidence on cat microchipping](#) to find out what the effects of making it mandatory would be on owners, rescue centres and cats. The closing date for evidence is 5pm on 4 January 2020.

Zac Goldsmith, Animal Welfare Minister said:

Microchips are often the only hope of reuniting lost pets with their owners so it truly is the best New Year's resolution you could make to protect your furry friend in 2020. I urge cat owners to microchip their cat and for dog-owners to make sure the details on the chip are up to date.

Jacqui Cuff, Cats Protection's Head of Advocacy and Government Relations said:

It is so important that cat owners microchip their pet cats as it is a safe and permanent form of identification. Cats love to explore, and are also great escape artists, so microchipping is important for cats, even those that live indoors.

Microchipping ensures lost cats can quickly be returned home, and that owners can be informed if their cat is injured and taken to a vet. We all want the best for our much-loved pets, so making a resolution to have your cat microchipped is a great way to start the year.

Cats Protection is delighted that the Government has shown its commitment to cat welfare and issued a call for evidence on cat microchipping including the benefits of making microchipping compulsory for cats, as it is for dogs.

Dogs Trust's Veterinary Director Paula Boyden said:

We see first-hand both the heartbreak that dog owners suffer when they are separated from their pets, as well as the joy of being reunited.

This is why it is so important that owners keep their details on

the microchip database up to date, as required by law. Doing so significantly increases the chances of a lost or stolen dog being reunited with their owner.

As an example, in last year's Stray Dog Survey we uncovered that, of the dogs seized who were microchipped, a staggering 69% weren't able to be reunited due to incorrect contact details.

This government is committed to animal welfare and has already taken a strong stand in this area by banning wild animals in travelling circuses, committing to increasing maximum sentencing for animal cruelty from six months to five years, and making CCTV cameras mandatory in all slaughterhouses.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Board appointments

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon Julian Smith MP, today announced that he has appointed Councillors Allan Bresland, Catherine Elattar and Michael Ruane and Alderman Amanda Grehan to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Board. In the absence of Northern Ireland Ministers, these appointments were made possible by the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018.

These appointments will take effect from today (1 January 2020) until the date of the next Council elections and will ensure that the NIHE Board can continue to deliver vital public services within its remit for the benefit of the Northern Ireland community.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

The NIHE is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the NI Department for Communities and was established by the Housing Executive Act (Northern Ireland) 1971. Under this Act, the NIHE took over the housing responsibilities of 65 separate authorities and became Northern Ireland's overall housing authority. It is currently landlord to approximately 86,500 dwellings and is one of Northern Ireland's largest public sector organisations with a budget of over £740m and a staff of approximately 2,700. It also makes a substantial contribution to better health, education and wellbeing through housing.

Provision for the NIHE Board is set out in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The principal role of the Board is to set the strategic direction for the Housing Executive and to provide stewardship of all public resources entrusted to it to implement the policies and priorities of the Minister and the Executive. The Board oversees the performance and outputs of the

executive team, which is responsible for the day-to-day conduct of the business within the Housing Executive. The Board also sets the attitude and disposition of the organisation towards compliance with applicable laws and best practice.

Terms of appointment

Current remuneration for the position of a Board Member is £6,892 per annum plus expenses, with an expected time commitment of 1 day per month.

CPANI Code of Practice

This appointment process has been regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment NI (CPANI) and the appointments have been made in accordance with the CPANI Code of Practice.

Political Activity

All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. However, CPANI requires the political activity of appointees to be published which is included in the biographies below.

Biography of Appointees

Cllr Ruane has served as a local councillor for Sinn Fein for 19 years, previously with the Newry and Mourne Council and currently with the Newry, Mourne and Down Council. Mr Ruane has served on a number of committees within the councils, including the Audit Committee and brings relevant governance skills to the Board. He has relevant stakeholder engagement skills and experience. He holds no other public appointments.

Alderman Grehan has been a Local Councillor for the Alliance party for five years and was Deputy Mayor of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council in 2018-19. She was also chairperson of its Governance and Audit Committee in 2017-18, where she has gained relevant governance and risk management experience. Alderman Grehan was also vice-chair of the Corporate Services Committee in 2016-17. She has also been the manager of her local MLA's constituency office for 12 years, and brings communication skills and resource management experience to the Board. She holds no other public appointments.

Cllr Elattar has been a Sinn Fein local Councillor since 2011 when she was elected to Magherafelt District Council. She has previously held the position of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council. She was elected to the new Mid Ulster District Council in May 2014 and is a member of the Development Committee and the Policy Resources Committee. Previously employed in community education, Councillor Elattar is now a midwife, working for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. She previously served on the NIHE Board from 1 June 2015 to 1 May 2019, and holds no other public appointments.

Cllr Bresland has served as a DUP councillor for over 28 years and is currently a member of the Derry and Strabane Council. Mr Bresland has served

on a number of committees within the councils, including the Planning Committee and Environmental and Regeneration Committee, skills and experience of which he brings to the Board. He is a former member of the NI Assembly, having served as a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee. He holds no other public appointments.

Statutory Requirements

Provision for the NIHE Board is set out in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. In October 2018, the Secretary of State for NI introduced legislation in Parliament; the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act 2018 received Royal Assent on 1 November. This legislation provides for the appointment to a number of public offices by the Secretary of State. The NI (Ministerial Appointment Functions) Regulations 2019 came into force on 18 February 2019. This Instrument provided for further critical appointments, including that of the NIHE Board.

Prime Minister's New Year's message: 31 December 2019

That distinctive sound you may have heard at midnight as the bongos of Big Ben faded away was not the popping of champagne corks or the crackle of fireworks from your neighbour's garden.

Rather it was the starting gun being fired on what promises to be a fantastic year and a remarkable decade for our United Kingdom.

As we say goodbye to 2019 we can also turn the page on the division, rancour and uncertainty which has dominated public life and held us back for far too long. We can start a new chapter in the history of our country, in which we come together and move forward united, unleashing the enormous potential of the British people.

Of course the first item on my agenda is to fulfil the will of the electorate and take us out of the European Union. This should have happened already, but we were thwarted by a Parliament determined to use every trick in the book to stop us leaving the EU.

Now we have a new Parliament, elected by the people to deliver the people's priorities, which will finally respect the referendum and deliver Brexit.

So we'll get Brexit done before the end of this month. That oven-ready deal I talked about so much during the election campaign has already had its plastic covering pierced and been placed in the microwave.

We got down to work immediately after the election. The necessary legislation

has already begun its passage through Parliament and, once MPs return to Westminster, we'll waste no time in finishing the job. At long last we will take back control of our laws, borders, money and trade.

Then we can finally spend 2020 getting on with delivering on the people's priorities: boosting the NHS with the biggest cash injection in its history, renewing schools, backing scientists, building better infrastructure, controlling immigration, making our streets safer, cleaning up our environment, and making our Union stronger.

The loudest message I heard during the election campaign is that people expect us – expect me – to protect and improve the NHS. The NHS is a wonderful British invention, there for us and our families when we are ill, whatever our background and regardless of ability to pay.

So the NHS will always be my top priority. One of our first actions will be to pass a bill enshrining in law a record funding settlement for the NHS, providing an extra £34 billion a year. We will undertake the largest hospital building programme in living memory, delivering 40 new hospitals and 20 upgrades. We'll ensure there are 50,000 more nurses, 6,000 more GPs, and 50 million more GP surgery appointments.

I also want to make this country the best place on earth when it comes to quality education and cutting-edge science. It's great that we have started to climb back up the international school league tables – now let's make it to the very top. We will support hardworking teachers by boosting per pupil funding in primary and secondary schools and we will transform this country's approach to science and research, making the UK an engine for the ideas of the future.

Our vision is clear: to unite and level up across the whole United Kingdom – spreading opportunity more fairly – with better infrastructure, superb education and high technology.

We will do all of this while keeping your taxes low, freezing rates of income tax, VAT and National Insurance.

It is thanks to you, the people, that we are on the path to a brighter future. It was your decisiveness at the ballot box, your determination to drive an electoral bulldozer through the deadlock and paralysis, that has unblocked parliament and delivered a people's government dedicated to serving you.

I know that many of you do not consider yourself natural Tories and may only have lent me your vote. I am humbled by your support and will work every day to keep it. I am also acutely aware that there are millions of people who did not vote for me and were disappointed by the result.

If you are one of them, I want to reassure you that I will be a Prime Minister for everyone, not just those who voted for me. I know that you love this country no less, simply because you voted for another party or wanted to Remain. More than that, I want to work with you, as friends and equals, as we

build the future this United Kingdom deserves.

So let's together make the 2020s a decade of prosperity and opportunity. State of the art healthcare. Great schools in every community. Our cities and towns more connected than ever before – not just in London and the South East but in the Midlands, the North and across the country. New trading relationships with nations around the world, generating jobs and growth. British scientists and engineers transforming the way we live – curing incurable diseases and making transport cleaner, greener and quieter.

It's a fantastically exciting agenda. Let's get to work.

Treasury Solicitor Jonathan Jones QC awarded KCB

Government Legal Department Permanent Secretary, Treasury Solicitor and HM Procurator General Jonathan Jones QC was recognised for providing legal services of the 'highest calibre' and the building of a shared legal service across government, as well as his wider contribution to the leadership of the Civil Service and of the legal profession.

This knighthood adds to Jonathan's 2019 honour of becoming honorary Queen's Counsel.

On receiving this honour, Jonathan said:

"I'm extremely honoured by this award. It is a great privilege to lead the Government Legal Department and its dedicated, hard-working people in our work of unique legal and constitutional importance.

I'm also delighted to congratulate the other government lawyers included in the honours list for their distinguished public service."

They include:

- Catherine Adams, DExEU Legal Director, who is made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG)
- Suzanne Lehrer from Defra Legal Advisers who was awarded an OBE

And in the wider Government Legal Profession:

- Nicola Smith Legal Counsellor at FC0 was awarded an OBE
- John Patrick Banks at HMRC was also awarded an OBE

Since the creation of the Government Legal Department in 2015 our purpose has been to help the government of the day to govern well, within the rule of law.

Our strategy is to deliver high quality trusted legal services for government, on some of the most important issues of the day – from significant constitutional issues including the Withdrawal Agreement that led to the bill for the UK to leave the European Union and the prorogation of Parliament.

We handle wider government legal issues relating to topics that include rail franchising, governance in Northern Ireland, the terrorist attacks at London Bridge and Manchester Arena and the NHS scandal when up to 30,00 people were given contaminated blood.

The Government Legal Department is now supporting the government's legislative agenda as set out in the Queen's speech on 14 October, to deliver a programme of UK domestic reforms, alongside the key priority to secure the UK's departure from the European Union.