

# Press release: Business Advisory Group: political stability vital for strong economy

The Secretary of State restated the Government's commitment to returning devolved power-sharing government to Northern Ireland as soon as possible, providing attendees with an update on the current political situation; and discussed the UK Government's Industrial Strategy.

The session was the latest in a series of meetings to help businesses engage with UK Government and provide input on a range of strategic economic and business critical issues facing Northern Ireland, including developing skills, upgrading infrastructure, improving procurement and delivering affordable energy and clean growth. Mr Brokenshire also led members in a discussion on the opportunities presented by leaving the EU.

The meeting followed another round-table on the Industrial Strategy yesterday, chaired by Lord Dunlop and BEIS Minister, Lord Prior, in London, which focused on trade and inward investment, cultivating world leading sectors, driving growth across the whole country and creating the right institutions to bring together sectors and places.

Speaking after the meeting, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Political stability is a fundamental basis for industrial success. Securing strong, stable devolved institutions in Northern Ireland that will provide leadership, support innovation and boost skills will be integral to delivering on Northern Ireland's potential as a place to invest and do business.

It is, therefore, vital that devolved government is returned to Northern Ireland as soon as possible and the Government's clear focus is on achieving that.

The Industrial Strategy is a key part of this Government's plan to drive growth across the whole United Kingdom and create more highly-skilled, highly-paid jobs and opportunities. A strong skills system will drive increases in productivity and improvements in social mobility, putting in place enduring reforms so that everyone has a chance to achieve their full potential in the workplace.

I urged members to use their influence to encourage political

parties to deliver a functioning and effective Executive so we can continue to build an economy that works for everyone.

The Secretary of State and his Ministers have now engaged with local businesses on all ten pillars of the Industrial Strategy and will be reflecting the Northern Ireland views to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy when the formal consultation closes in a little under two weeks.

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## [News story: Torcross sea defence repaired after Devon storms](#)

The Environment Agency has finished repairing Torcross sea defence after damage caused by the storms of February 2016.

Those storms saw large waves hit the sea defence when beach levels were low, causing cracks to appear along the promenade.

The repaired wall cost £2.4 million and reduces the risk of flooding to 51 properties. It is designed to withstand a severe storm, even when beach levels are low. Steel sheet piles have been installed directly in front of the existing line of piles with a new reinforced concrete capping beam. These double-length piles give the wall extra stability.

Steel sheet piles have been driven in front of existing piles and topped with concrete beams

The Environment Agency's Becky Richards said:

A huge thank you to all the residents of Torcross who have supported our repair work.

The project team worked hard to complete this repair quickly as possible, and our contractor, BMM JV, has done well to complete the works in time for the Easter holidays.

Local MP Dr Sarah Wollaston said:

Thank you so much to all those who have worked hard to restore the sea defences at Torcross, and to the community and agencies which came together during the anxious weeks following last year's storms to get things done.

The Environment Agency will inspect the defence every 24 months and monitor the repair during periods of bad weather.

A complementary project is underway to identify the best beach management options for Torcross. South Hams District Council is creating a Torcross and Slapton Beach Management Plan on behalf of The Slapton Line Partnership, to which the Environment Agency will contribute.

Alan Denbigh, Chair of the Slapton Line Partnership, said:

Together we hope to identify the best long-term beach management options to reduce the impact of storms at Torcross.

We are planning events in summer 2017 for residents and businesses in and around Torcross to talk about the plan. Visit [www.slaptonline.org](http://www.slaptonline.org) to find out more.

Even with this sea defence, parts of Torcross remain at a high risk of flooding from the sea. High risk means that each year this area is at significant risk of flooding during storms due to waves.

Everyone has a part to play to protect themselves from the risk of flooding. There are some simple steps you can take now:

To report an emergency flood incident in Torcross call our 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

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Everyone has a part to play to protect themselves from the risk of flooding. There are some simple steps you can take now:

- Use our flood map to see which areas are more likely to flood first, deepest, or most often [by entering your postcode](#)
- Register for Floodline – if you're at risk of flooding, you may be able to receive flood alerts and warnings, completely free
- Be prepared – know what to do if flooding happens with a flood plan – [download a personal, business or even a community flood plan template](#)

To report an emergency flood incident in Torcross call our 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

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## [Press release: Foreign Secretary comments on reports of chemical weapons attack in Syria](#)

On reports of a chemical weapons attack near Idlib in Syria, the Foreign Secretary said:

I am horrified by the reports of an attack near Idlib in Syria. The reports we are receiving strongly suggest the use of chemical weapons. And although we cannot yet be certain about what has happened, this bears all the hallmarks of an attack by the regime which has repeatedly used chemical weapons.

The UK condemns the use of chemical weapons wherever and by whomever they are used and we will continue to lead international

efforts to hold perpetrators to account. We continue to support the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and will work closely with them as they seek to investigate this latest incident.

If this is shown to be the work of the regime, it is further evidence of the atrocities perpetrated against the Syrian people over six years of appalling conflict.

Commenting on the UK co-hosted Syria conference in Brussels tomorrow the Foreign Secretary said:

It is vital that the international community continues to support the Syrian people. I am determined that the conference which the UK is co-hosting in Brussels steps up international assistance to the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict. The UK is playing a leading role, with the Prime Minister's announcement of a £1 billion package the latest element of our vital support.

## **Further information**

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## **[News story: Thousands of BPS 2017 applications received](#)**

More than 10,000 2017 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) applications have been submitted since the application window opened on 1 March, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) announced today (4 April).

The RPA is encouraging farmers to apply online now, to ensure that their application is submitted before the deadline.

Applying online means that farmers and agents can quickly check and update existing personal and business details, as well as view and transfer land and entitlements.

Last year the RPA received a record 80% of applications online and almost 7,000 farmers and agents have started an online application for BPS 2017.

RPA Interim Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:

More and more farmers and agents are using the Rural Payments service to apply online. Some 1,500 entitlements have been transferred online so far.

Throughout the application process, help and support is available through our online guidance, 'How to' videos and by telephone.

## **Online and paper applications**

Anyone who applied online for the Basic Payment Scheme in 2016 has been emailed all they need to apply online for BPS in 2017. Those who did not apply online in 2016 and did not use an agent have been sent a paper form and guidance on how to apply online.

## **Support available from the RPA**

Farmers and anyone helping them with their claim can find step-by-step guides on transferring land, transferring entitlements and a general overview of how to apply online in useful ['How to' videos](#). Further guidance and scheme rules can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

On-screen help is also available, going through the application process screen by screen. A copy of this on-screen guide is also [available for download or print](#).

The application deadline for BPS 2017 is midnight on 15 May 2017. Late applications will be accepted until 9 June but will incur a penalty. More information on how to claim or amend applications in the penalty claim period can be found in the Key Dates section of the [2017 guidance](#).