

# News story: Brokenshire: Round table talks paused

Mr Brokenshire commented:

The current phase of roundtable talks over the past ten days to help resolve issues will pause for Easter. Bilateral discussions between the parties and with the UK and Irish Governments will continue, in accordance with the three-stranded approach.

All the parties have been actively engaged and some further progress has been made, including on the formation of an Executive and on legacy. There is, however, still a lack of agreement between the parties on a small but significant number of issues. The restoration of devolved government remains achievable, but more time and a more focused engagement on the critical issues are required.

The parties will have a final opportunity after Easter to reach agreement, building on the discussions which have taken place over the past six weeks.

I said that I would use the period up to Easter to determine what legislation should be introduced into Parliament after Easter to address immediate requirements. I have already indicated that I will introduce legislation to set this year's regional rate to address the urgent need for rates bills to be issued by Councils. In addition, I believe it is also right to introduce provisions that would enable an Executive to be formed in early May should agreement be reached.

On 2 March the people of Northern Ireland voted clearly for devolved government. The parties mandated by that election still have a duty to provide the government for which they campaigned. I believe that the outstanding issues between the parties are surmountable, but if no Executive is formed by early May, I will need to take further steps to ensure Northern Ireland has the political stability it needs.

This is likely to mean, however undesirable, either a second

election or a return to decision making from Westminster.

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## **Press release: Doncaster teens take lead on environmental improvements**

The children at XP Secondary School have been working with experts from the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to research and improve how surface water drains away from the land.

Their findings have helped with the installation of a new sustainable drainage system (SUD) on the school's grounds, designed to mimic nature in the way it allows water to soak away.

Dave Newborough from the Environment Agency said:

SUDs help slow down the flow of surface water, giving it time to soak into the ground and for pollutants to be naturally filtered out before entering local watercourses.

In doing so, they help reduce the risk of flooding and improve water quality, as well as enhance the environment for people and wildlife.

XP's students carefully studied their school grounds, carrying out environmental experiments to determine how a SUD would work best. They presented their findings to a panel of experts, including Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, before helping to plant hedges that form an important part of the new drainage system.

The project has given the kids a real sense of ownership in their local water environment, which they can pass on to their family and friends," says Dave.

They've also learnt first hand how the water cycle works and how it can be affected by urbanisation and pollution. And they've had the opportunity to explore local wetland at Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Potteric Carr Nature Reserve, discovering its importance for biodiversity and for managing flood risk.

The work at XP Secondary School is part of Inspiring Water Action in the

Torne (iWAIT), an Environment Agency led project restoring almost 50 hectares of rare wet woodland priority habitats at 7 sites in Doncaster.

Around 450 children and young people across 7 schools, each linked with one of the woodland sites, are using the project to learn about flood risk, water quality and management, and ecology.

Three of the schools, including XP, will have SUDs fitted to manage the quantity and quality of surface water feeding the restored wetlands, as well as helping to involve young people in environmental activities and learning.

iWAIT is a Torne Catchment Partnership project led by the Environment Agency and involving Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, Natural England and local communities.

ENDS

## Notes for editors

- The iWAIT project is turning 46.5ha of non-priority habitat into priority habitat – this is 11% of the Environment Agency’s nationwide target 400ha for habitat creation.
- A priority habitat is one identified as being the most threatened and requires conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Wet woodland is a biodiversity habitat, important for animals and plants. It supports a large number of species, many of which are now rare in the UK.
- For more information on the iWAIT project, see this [previous news release](#).
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is a local charity which works to create a Yorkshire rich in wildlife for the benefit of everyone. Our goal is nature’s recovery, on land and at sea. We stand up for Yorkshire’s wildlife wherever it is under threat, and work with others to find solutions that benefit both wildlife and people. We inspire thousands of children, families and others every year, reconnecting them with their local environment and wildlife. With the support of these people, we are restoring and recreating a habitats in Yorkshire and raising awareness of, and fighting for, Yorkshire’s seas.

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## [News story: Procurement for apprenticeship training in smaller employers](#)

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has carefully considered the applications made in response to the recent procurement for apprenticeship

training provision for non-levy-paying employers.

This procurement was markedly oversubscribed, a sign of the significant level of interest from the training provider market in the apprenticeship reforms. In response, ESFA intends to pause the current competition. This will allow us to review our approach to ensure that we achieve the right balance between stability of supply and promoting competition and choice for employers. It is important that we fully consider how best to achieve these outcomes in a way that achieves the best value for employers and apprentices as we move to a fully employer-led system.

We will undertake further engagement with the market to clarify our approach, and ensure that this meets the government's wider objectives of securing stability in the market, good sectoral and geographical coverage of provision, and a market which meets the skills needs of employers. We will issue further guidance shortly.

In order to maintain stability in the system through the start of the next academic year, in the interim period we will extend existing contracts held by all current providers until the end of December 2017. To maintain our quality standards, current providers with extended contracts will be able to undertake new starts on those contracts provided they are on the [Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers](#). The ESFA will notify providers of specific arrangements shortly so that amended contracts are in place ahead of 1 May.

This will not affect training provision for existing learners. Extending existing providers contracts means employers can be confident in taking on new apprentices without disruption over the months ahead.

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## **Press release: Man fined for running illegal waste site**

A Gateshead man has been fined and ordered to pay thousands of pounds in compensation after he illegally stored waste at a site and then abandoned it.

John James Armstrong, 52, of Park Lane, Winlaton Mill, appeared at North Tyneside Magistrates' Court on Friday 7 April.

He pleaded guilty to one offence of operating a waste site without a permit.

He was fined £1,000, ordered to pay compensation of £7,069.49 to the landowner to cover the costs they paid to clear the site, and £1,591.26 costs.

Armstrong was Director of Canterhall Builders Limited, a construction company which dissolved on 23 May 2016.

Prosecuting on behalf of the Environment Agency, Simon Crowder told the court that on 20 April, 2016, two Environment Agency officers attended the unit at Unit 1 Felling Business Centre, Green Lane.

They saw the site was covered in construction waste, including bricks, broken concrete, wood, plaster board, insulations, pallets, old kitchen units, benches and electrical waste. There was also a skip full of building waste.

Enquiries revealed that Canterhall were tenants at the site but had abandoned it earlier in the month.

On 16 May a letter requesting removal of the waste was given to the landowner. On 23 May Environment Agency officers traced the defendant to a site in Swalwell, where he was given a letter inviting him to be interviewed.

Two days later the site at Felling was cleared by the landowners, at a total cost to them of more than £7,000.

The defendant has no previous convictions and was co-operative during the investigation.

During an interview on 2 June he said that if it was not cost effective to hire a skip to remove waste from carrying out construction work, then he would instead transport the waste back to the unit. When there was enough waste at the unit he would then order a skip to have it removed.

He said in January 2016 more and more waste was deposited at the unit and due to financial problems he could not afford skips to get the waste removed. He said he left the unit on 10 April and had made no attempts to clear the waste.

He added he was unaware of the need for an environmental permit or registered exemptions.

The Environment Agency's Paul Whitehill said:

We take waste crime very seriously. It can cause serious pollution to the environment, put communities at risk and undermine local businesses.

The defended flouted the law for financial gain – he cut costs by not hiring skips at the sites where work was taking place to ensure disposal of the waste.

He also avoided the cost of an environmental permit and annual subsistence fees. Illegal waste activities that avoid regulatory controls don't have the appropriate infrastructure to protect the environment, and can have a detrimental impact on local communities.

The sentence follows calls from the Environment Agency warning landowners

about criminals looking to profit by dumping waste illegally on their land.

Landowners can often find their property filled with waste and abandoned by tenants, leaving owners with an expensive clean-up bill. The Environment Agency is cracking down on waste crime and taking tough action to deal with this behaviour.

This ruling demonstrates that people can be made to pay for the cost of clearing the mess they leave behind.

Information and advice about environmental permits can be found on the Environment Agency website. To report illegal waste activity contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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## **£6m funding for third sector organisations**

£4.5m of core funding has been allocated to Third Sector Support Wales to help them provide advice and training to third sector organisations across the country for key activities such as fundraising and governance.

A further £1.3m has been awarded to the Volunteering Wales grant scheme to provide support to volunteer-involving organisations and £41,000 has been awarded to the Community Foundation in Wales, a charity which distributes grants to community groups and voluntary organisations throughout Wales. The money will part fund two posts at the charity.

The remaining funding will be used to compensate Third Sector organisations who are members of the Third Sector Partnership Council for the time spent working with the Welsh Government and organising network events to share Welsh Government priorities and research the views of the sector to share with Ministers.

Announcing the funding, the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Third Sector organisations play a vital role in Wales, whether that is providing services, supporting vulnerable people, improving their communities or providing opportunities for people to build confidence and learn new skills. I am therefore delighted to be awarding this funding to support them to continue the excellent work they do and to build on it for the future.”