

## Press release: NI parties invited to intensive talks

The main political parties in Northern Ireland are being invited to attend political talks on Monday 3 April at Stormont Castle, Belfast.

The talks will have two objectives.

First, to secure a coalition agreement to form the basis of the formation of a new Executive. Second, to address the implementation of outstanding issues from previous Agreements.

In a shared approach, the UK government and Irish government have agreed this phase of talks will be best supported by an intensive process to drive progress.

This includes:

- An agreed agenda;
- A structure of bilateral meetings;
- Regular roundtables; and
- A coordination mechanism across all the issues.

The talks will be conducted in accordance with the well-established three stranded approach.

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## Paul Blomfield responds to reports that EU nationals are finding it difficult to get mortgages agreed by UK lenders

**Paul**

**Blomfield MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Exiting the European Union,**  
commenting on

reports that EU nationals are finding it difficult to get mortgages agreed by UK lenders, said:

"How

many more reports like this does the Government need before it realises it is committing a huge act of self-harm by not granting non-UK EU citizens

certainty?

“EU

nationals, many of whom have been here decades, will simply vote with their feet if they can't secure jobs or homes here.

“This

would spell disaster for our economy, our public services and our communities.

“It's

beyond time for the Government to see sense.”

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## Funding announced for Armed Forces free swimming scheme

AFFS was rolled out nationally from November 2015, with all 22 Local Authorities having a local scheme in place by 1st January 2016. It enables serving members of the Armed Forces and Veterans to swim for free at participating leisure centres and pools, using their Defence Privilege Card.

The funding, announced today, will support the delivery of the scheme in 2017-18.

Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans, said:

“Physical activity has a huge impact on people's health and wellbeing. The free swimming scheme was designed to ensure members of the Armed Forces past and present are able to benefit from the physical, and mental, health benefits swimming can offer. I am very pleased to announce £75,000 funding for the initiative in 2017-18.”

Communities Secretary, Carl Sargeant, said:

“We owe our Armed Forces a huge debt of gratitude. The free swimming initiative is part of a wider package of support we are pleased to provide to the Armed Forces community in recognition of their service.”

Chris Llewelyn, WLGA Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information, said:

“Local Government is proud to deliver free swimming for our Armed Forces personnel and Veterans. We hope that even more people take part in the scheme in the coming year, taking advantage of the significant recuperative and social benefits physical activity offers. There are participating pools in each of Wales’ local authorities; to find out where your closest facility is, visit your Local Authority website.”

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## **For too long the bus industry has put profit before passengers. Labour will change that – Jeremy Corbyn**

Labour

will overturn the Government’s ban on council-owned bus companies as part of a wider strategy to put the public back into buses and deliver affordable, greener, and accessible transport.

Labour

unveiled its bus strategy to put people not private profit first after figures revealed that passenger journeys in England outside London have declined by 39 percent and by 53 per cent in English cities since 1986. But over the same period in London, which kept regulation of bus services, passenger journeys increased by 99 per cent.

Labour’s

policy includes a commitment to low emissions vehicles, Wi-Fi enabled buses, improved joint and through ticketing schemes, mandatory disability and equality training, and a commitment to introduce a national strategy for local bus services, setting out objectives, targets and funding provisions, including considering concessionary fares for 16-19 year olds.

**Jeremy**

**Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, said:**

“Labour

will create the freedom for councils to run first class bus services which the public are proud of. The Tory legacy brought rising fares, plummeting passenger numbers and too many areas where pensioners have a bus pass but no bus.

“Labour

wants to see local communities empowered to determine their own priorities and reverse the decline in bus services. Labour will extend franchising powers to all areas that want them and will overturn the ban on new community bus companies, allowing Local Authorities to replicate the successes of the country’s best performing operators.

“For

too long the bus industry has put profit before passengers. Labour will change that.”

**Andy**

**McDonald MP, Labour’s Shadow Transport Secretary, said:**

“Buses

are by far the most important mode of public transport, connecting communities, places of education and businesses like no other.

“In

supporting local economies, combatting climate change, addressing air quality and tackling social exclusion, the importance of buses cannot be over-stated. Yet funding for buses across England and Wales has been cut by 33 per cent since 2010 and thousands of routes have been downgraded or cut altogether, meaning passengers across the country have to put up with sub-standard services.

“We

want to see clean, hi-tech fleets of buses running accessible and reliable services that meet passengers’ needs. For this to happen, we need to give communities the power to reform bus services to make them work for passengers, as well as ensuring the funding and strategy is in place to ensure no communities are left behind.”

Labour’s

policy would:

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Create freedom for local authorities to form their own bus companies by removing the Government’s ban.

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Extend the powers to re-regulate local bus services to all areas that want them

– not just to combined authorities with an elected mayor.

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Require all new buses to meet the low-emission requirements set out by the Government-sponsored Office for Low Emission Vehicles.

- Require new vehicles to be equipped with Wi-Fi, and install Wi-Fi on existing buses.
- Introduce a national strategy for local bus services, setting out objectives, targets and funding provisions. This would include consideration of a reduced fare scheme for young people aged 16-19.
- Require all bus drivers and staff at bus terminals to complete approved disability equality and awareness training, including mental and physical disabilities, by a specific date.
- Ensure bus services in England make adjustments for any disabled passenger on the bus including policies for priority wheelchair spaces.

Labour

leader Jeremy Corbyn and shadow transport secretary Andy McDonald are in Tees Valley today (Friday) promoting Labour's bus policy.

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## [News story: UK entrepreneurs are disrupting the business world](#)

Joint list by Maserati and The Sunday Times names 9 companies that have progressed with Innovate UK funding in top 100 game changers.

The [Maserati 100](#) highlights the emerging entrepreneurs who are challenging the established order with their disruptive technologies. Now in its third year, these awards celebrate the positive impact innovative start-ups have on the economy and society as a whole.

Nine businesses that have received funding from Innovate UK featured in the list.

- [Crisp Thinking Group](#) – using Crisp's software, companies are able to moderate and monitor social media to protect their brands. It has offices in Leeds, London and New York. Crisp received funding to prototype their real-time social media management platform
- [Ella's Kitchen](#) – making and selling organic baby food since 2006, the company now employs 70 people in the UK and takes 20% of the market. Global turnover is more than \$100 million. Ella's Kitchen has taken part in 3 knowledge transfer partnerships (KTP) with the University of Reading, to look at its marketing, raw materials and packaging

## Ella's Kitchen: transforming the organic baby food market

- [Horizon Discovery](#) – a gene-editing biotech company, Horizon Discovery supports the discovery of new medicines, including personalised medicines for treating cancer. It has already acquired a number of US companies to further grow the business. Innovate UK funded collaborative research and development projects to find innovative approaches for the manufacture of high-value, genome-edited cell lines
- [M Squared Lasers](#) – the Glasgow-based company designs and manufactures lasers for use in industry, defence, healthcare and energy. Its revenues totalled more than £8 million last year. Innovate UK has funded several projects to help M Squared Lasers optimise laser emission intensity, develop high precision, handheld spectrometry and grow the market

Nils Hempler of M Squared Lasers.

- [Metail](#) – offering virtual fitting rooms to allow shoppers to create 3D models of themselves and try on clothes. Evans and House of Holland are among the retailers to have signed up. Metail received Innovate UK funding for feasibility and proof of concept studies, as well as prototype testing. This helped the company to develop computer vision techniques and digitise garments with lower costs and simpler operations
- [Ocado](#) – a pioneering online supermarket with annual sales of £1.3 billion. Ocado was involved in a collaborative, 24-month project to trial a range of vehicles with hydrogen dual-fuel technology, in order to reduce the carbon of its vehicles
- [Swiftkey](#) – predictive keyboard software that's installed in more than 300 million smartphones and tablets. Last year Swiftkey acquired by Microsoft in a deal reported to be worth \$250m. Swiftkey received 2 Innovate UK grants, to test its idea for an app that would transform the way people used keyboards and help prototype it

Swiftkey shown working on a mobile device.

- [The Floow](#) – this tool collects data for motor insurers from a driver's phone or a black box in their vehicle. Floow has more than 70 staff in Sheffield and clients include Direct Line and AIG. Floow was involved in a collaborative funding project to accelerate the development, market readiness and deployment of automated driving systems
- [The Framestore](#) – an innovative special effects firm that has worked on films including Gravity, the 2013 Oscar winner for Best Visual Effects. The Framestore received funding in 2 collaborative projects: to create an extensible, pluggable digital security framework that protects media companies; and the development of a production pipeline process that improves quality, speeds up production and reduces costs