



Northern Ireland
Executive

www.northernireland.gov.uk

Your **Executive**
working for **You**

Summary

£15m – Rapid Response Capacity

A Rapid Response Capacity will enable the Executive to provide a rapid and effective response to any situation it feels warrants the protection of local interests. On this occasion, this will be used to deliver £15m to those most vulnerable to fuel poverty.

Almost £70m – December Monitoring

Including £44.5m – Executive Response to Economic Downturn

The response will provide

- £15m – Fuel Credit
- £20m – Farm Nutrient Management
- £4m – Schools Maintenance
- £2.5m – Roads Structural Maintenance
- £1.8 – Public Transport Capital Works
- £0.5m – Agriculture Flooding Hardship
- £0.7m – Assistance to Fishing Industry

The investment in schools, roads and farms will have an immediate impact on the local construction industry.

Public Sector Construction Schemes

£1.2bn Public Sector Construction Schemes are currently on site.

Including:

- £440m of DRD Projects
- £200m underway across the schools estate
- £83m at eight Further Education Colleges
- £265m under construction in the health estate

Energy and Fuel Poverty

Dealing with problems associated with recent rises in energy prices

- £15m to help those most vulnerable to fuel poverty. More than 100,000 households on pension credit and income support will receive £150.
- £21m already committed to the warm homes scheme.
- DETI will work with the Regulator's office to explore whether there is scope for regulatory action for those in fuel poverty, taking account of the interests of all energy customers, including businesses.
- The Housing Executive is investigating the potential for acting as a broker to procure discounted energy for its tenants.
- Consultation on a new long-term Strategic Energy Framework which will consider how to reduce energy costs, build competitive, sustainable energy markets and increase our use of renewable energy. This will also consider changes to the regulatory energy framework as recommended by the recent energy price review.
- The First and deputy First Minister to meet with energy companies, particularly on the generating side of the industry and oil suppliers, to explore whether they can contribute more to alleviate fuel poverty.

Tackling debt and unemployment

- Citizens' Advice Bureau – DETI has in place a three year £1.2m contract to Citizens' Advice to continue to provide free, high quality debt advice. This will be increased by £400K a year and a further £200K a year will fund a new telephone-based debt advice service.
- Driving loan sharks out of business – Early in the new year DETI is proposing an initiative with the focus on Consumer Credit Act enforcement which will specifically target loan sharks activity. As a cross-cutting department OFMDFM will call together PSNI, DETI, voluntary/community organisations and others to address this issue.
- FM and dFM to ask local banks to become more directly involved in assistance for those who find themselves in debt. This and a range of other issues around mortgages and the reduction in interest rates will be the subject of a meeting with bankers tomorrow.
- Credit Unions – The Executive is keen to explore further how it might work with Credit Unions and others to promote responsible borrowing. We will also give urgent consideration to the recommendations from the ETI Committee's Review of Credit Unions and from the Treasury-led Review of the Legislative and Regulatory Framework of Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies. These will address the services that may be offered and the effectiveness of these arrangements for depositor protection.
- We have enhanced the Employment Service with 130 new staff recruited to deal with rising unemployment and the search for new work.

- We have 23 new Careers Advisers in place.
- We have implemented the Critical Sectors Initiative Programme delivering a suite of training programmes which will cost £15m over three years.
- We are proactively supporting programmes to encourage the uptake of benefits for the most vulnerable in our society. There are currently web based programmes in place which have been proven to increase benefit uptake amongst older people. The First Minister and deputy First Minister will explore the development of these programmes including widening their remit to include other groups on benefit.
- Since April 2008 over 5,000 cases have been adjusted upwards resulting in extra benefit payments of approximately £12.8m.

Dealing with the rising cost of living

- We have implemented a domestic rates freeze at a cost of £40m. The average household will be £1,000 better off during this Assembly term than would have been the case under Direct rule.
- We have waived domestic water charges for 2009/10 putting an average of £160 back in people's pockets.
- We have announced that prescriptions charges will be reduced in January 2009 and free from April 2010 at a total cost of £13m.
- We have extended the free bus scheme for the elderly at a cost of £4m.
- DETI is looking at how the Consumer Council's price watch consumer campaign can be more widely marketed.

Support for the housing market and construction industry

- £1.2bn public sector construction schemes are currently on site. £200m more than this time last year.
- The Executive, through DFP, will look at ways to maximize the opportunities for small contracting firms to bid for contracts.
- In order to benefit the most disadvantaged communities social procurement guidelines will form a central part of the Investment Strategy.
- DSD has a £150m budget for social housing.
- We have already announced the intention to press ahead with the £97m Titanic project subject to the satisfaction of certain conditions.
- By February 2009 we will have streamlined arrangements for small planning applications and the potential clearance of over 2,000 planning applications which can now be considered under PPS21.
- The scope of co-ownership and house sales schemes have been amended to make them more affordable.
- A mortgage rescue plan is being considered.
- We will have a phased introduction of developer contributions taking account of market conditions.
- We will consider more purchases of "off the shelf" housing from the private sector on a value for money basis.

- We have launched an “own a home” pilot scheme.
- We have encouraged banks and developers to come together with innovative schemes which allow first time buyers to share the risk of their investment with banks and developers.

Support for business

- DETI has announced provision of fast track support up to £5m to assist Invest NI clients by providing advice in the form of on site support.
- We have continued to apply the industrial de-rating and freight transport relief schemes at a cost of £15m.
- 99.7% of businesses in the private sector are SMEs and the Executive has agreed a new 10 day prompt payment policy across all departments.
- DEL has announced its intention to increase support for apprenticeship training.
- DEL has announced investment of £14.5m in an all-island research base in QUB and UU.
- DEL has two additional innovation fund projects at a cost of nearly £3m.
- The First Minister and deputy First Minister will establish a cross sector advisory forum to continue their dialogue with business, trade unions, and voluntary and community stakeholders.
- DETI has announced that the Economic Development Forum has established a sub-group to bring forward recommendations on further steps that might be taken to help business through the economic crisis.

- Research and development – DETI plan to launch a new, more flexible single R&D scheme to be implemented by Invest NI.