

Handling of
Announcement

COPING WITH FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Help for Businesses

Many businesses across all sectors have been affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. If yours is among them, you'll need quick access to reliable advice and practical guidance. Here's how to get the help you need.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Help for Business Scheme

The Executive recently announced a new scheme for those businesses which are suffering financial hardship as a result of the Foot and Mouth crisis. The scheme will be open to those businesses which can demonstrate a drop in turnover of 15% or more in the period 1 March to 31 May 2001, compared to the same period last year. Grant will be paid to the Rate Collection Agency on behalf of successful applicants, to be offset against their rates bill for that period.

For further information and an application form contact [*dedicated helpline no. to be provided by BDS later today*], or visit www.helpforbusinessni.gov.uk.

Deferral of Rates Payments and revaluation

As an immediate relief measure, perhaps while you are waiting to have a claim full rates relief processed, you may be able to have your rates payments deferred for three months, or seek to have the rateable value of your business temporarily reduced. You will be required to demonstrate that you are suffering hardship as a result of Foot and Mouth. Contact the Rate Collection Agency on [tel] for information on deferral of your rates payments. The Valuation and Lands Agency (VLA) may be able to temporarily reduce your rateable value. For further information contact the VLA at [tel.].

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme (SFLGS)

If you need additional finance, but security for a conventional business loan is a problem, the SFLGS may be able to help you. The scheme provides:

- Government guarantees on loans from approved lenders
- Loans can be for amounts between £5,000 and £100,000 (£250,000 for businesses trading for two years or more) over periods of two to 10 years.

Not all businesses are eligible and there are some restrictions on the use of the loan. All applications are made via lenders who make all commercial decisions.

Some temporary changes have been introduced to help businesses during the Foot and Mouth crisis. For example, the scheme now includes sectors which have previously been excluded: retailing, catering, motor vehicle repairs, hairdressing, estate agents, libraries, museums and theatrical companies. Lenders also have the flexibility to agree changes to existing loans. The maximum time for repayment of loans has increased by one year to 11 years, and capital repayment breaks have been increased from two to three years.

If you want more information about the scheme (including a list of approved lenders) contact the Small Business Service SFLGS unit on 0114 259 7308/9, e-mail SFLGS@sbs.gsi.gov.uk or visit www.businesslink.org

Tax and VAT

Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise will always do their best to help businesses in trouble. For advice on tax and VAT payments, call the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise helpline on 0845 300 0157.

ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Banks

If you're having problems with money, talk to your bank and other creditors as soon as you can. Banks understand the problems facing businesses affected by the Foot and Mouth outbreak and will consider each case individually. The earlier you can discuss the problem the more options you're likely to have.

LEDU

LEDU provides help for small businesses (normally those employing 50 or less) engaged in manufacturing and tradeable service activities. The range of available support includes information provision, guidance in business planning, assistance/advice with marketing, technical, quality, human resource and financial issues and, where appropriate, grant aid. Support is provided directly through LEDU's client executives and through third parties working on its behalf.

For further information contact LEDU on 028 9049 1031 or visit www.ledu-ni.gov.uk

IDB

IDB provides a range of business support services to its client companies. If you are an IDB client company you should contact your Client Executive as soon as possible to discuss how these may help you in your situation. You can contact IDB on 028 90233233 or visit www.idbni.gov.uk.

Handling of
Announcement

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) provides marketing advice, investment support and visitor servicing back-up to the tourism industry. Details relating to current Foot and Mouth issues are regularly updated on the NITB website www.discovernorthernireland.com.

For further information contact NITB Policy Co-ordination Unit on 028 90231221.

YOU AND YOUR EMPLOYEES

Employment Problems

It is important to look at what the crisis means for you and your staff. **The Training and Employment Agency's** network of jobcentres is a good place to get advice about issues like short-term working, laying off staff and recruitment. You'll find details of the jobcentre network in the phone book or at []

Benefits

The **Social Security Agency** can provide detailed advice on benefits to people whose employment is disrupted by Foot and Mouth, including the self-employed. This includes advice on Jobseeker's Allowance, Minimum Income Guarantee, Housing Benefit, the Social Fund and Working Families Tax Credit. A special leaflet detailing this has been designed and is available from Social Security Offices or by visiting the Social Security Agency website at www.ssani.gov.uk, which also contains more detailed information on benefits.

THE FARMING COMMUNITY

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is the first point of contact for the farming community, should it be information on compensation, or general advice about your farm business. The DARD helpline number is 028 90524279, and up to date advice on the FMD situation can be found on the DARD website at www.dardni.gov.uk.

OTHER PLACES TO GO FOR HELP

If you belong to a trade association or representative body (for example the Federation of Small Businesses) they may be able to offer additional advice and assistance. Citizens Advice Bureau (CABs), www.niacab.org offer free confidential advice on a range of issues. Your local CAB will be listed in the phone book or on the website. The Association of Independent Advice Centres (AIACs), 028 9064 5919 www.aiac.net offer access to a broad range of information regarding social welfare and legal matters.

Handling of
Announcement

DRAFT – for clearance through written procedure

E WP (01)--

From: Executive Secretariat

To: The Executive

**FOOT AND MOUTH: RESPONSE TO WIDER ECONOMIC
IMPACT**

Summary

Issue: Wider context of proposed financial hardship scheme (“Help for Business Scheme”), and text for information pamphlet.

Recommendation: The Executive approve, through written procedure by 12 noon, Friday, 18 May, the draft action plan at Annex A, and the text of the information leaflet at Annex B which is to be circulated following the announcement of the Help for Business Scheme.

Background

1. The Minister of Finance and Personnel has tabled a paper for Thursday’s Executive meeting, setting out details of the proposed financial hardship scheme (“Help for Business”), designed to help those businesses worst affected by Foot and Mouth (FMD).
2. As was suggested in paper E(01) 116 to the Executive, for the meeting on 3 May 2001, in publicising this scheme there will be strong merit in placing the Help for Business Scheme in the context of a wider range of initiatives that are taking place, some of them already

Handling of
Announcement

announced, some of them new, and insuring that the public is aware of the different support arrangements.

3. We should for example highlight the £1m Tourism Recovery Strategy, which is of course more significant proportionately in Northern Ireland than in GB. Further, DETI is now preparing for widescale advisory assistance to small businesses organised through the five regional LEDU offices, thereby replicating the sort of advisory assistance which has been foreseen in GB.

Action Plan

4. At the meeting on 3 May the Executive approved an outline strategy for tackling the wider economic impact of FMD, and asked officials on the Economic Taskforce to develop a more detailed action plan. This has now been done, and the resulting action plan is attached at Annex A for the Executive's consideration and endorsement.

Information Pamphlet and Website

5. The action plan is designed to be an internal management document, which can be used to monitor the changing situation. A more user-friendly information pamphlet has been prepared for public circulation. The pamphlet will provide an easily accessible summary of sources of help and support for affected businesses. It will also publicise the Help for Business hardship scheme, and provide all the relevant contact numbers and web addresses. A dedicated website is also being prepared with the domain name www.helpforbusinessni.gov.uk. This will carry all the information in the pamphlet, with links to other relevant websites, and will also have

Handling of
Announcement

the capacity to carry copies of application forms for the hardship scheme.

6. The Executive is asked to agree the text for the information pamphlet, attached at Annex B so that immediate printing can be organised to have the pamphlet (and the website) available on the day the Help for Business scheme is announced.
7. Issues surrounding the handling of the announcement of the scheme and associated publicity will be dealt with separately.

Recommendation

8. It is recommended that the Executive:
 - Approves the action plan at Annex A and agrees that the scheme should be set in the context of the wider range of measures contained in the action plan;
 - Approves the text of the information pamphlet at Annex B; and
 - Notes that publicity/handling issues will be dealt with separately.

Executive Secretariat

Handling of
Announcement

DRAFT

**FROM: WILL HAIRE
ECONOMIC POLICY UNIT
MAY 2001**

**cc PS/Mr Loughran
Mr McCusker
Mrs Flanagan
Mr McKervill
Mrs Devlin
Mrs Cassells
Mrs Godfrey
Mrs Armstrong**

**TO: PETER MAY
DAVID LAVERY**

HANDLING OF ANNOUNCEMENT OF FMD SCHEME AND STRATEGY

1. This note seeks your urgent advice on how an announcement on the FMD Hardship Scheme, perhaps set in the context of the wider response by the Executive, might be made on Monday.
2. I understand that previous discussion around the Executive have led to the conclusion that this announcement should be made ideally by the answering of a Question, as opposed to a Statement.
3. While we are trying to check with DFP on how they needed to notify the Assembly for an extra-statutory scheme, there appear to be three levels of question/statements that might be made. These are in ascending order of significance:-

- (a) **Priority written question** – used for fairly minor announcements, only made available for public on the following Saturday.
- (b) **Private notice question** - this form of question has to be related to a matter of public interest, and this is not normally used as a form of pre-arranged announcement by the Executive. Indeed there is an argument that if the Speaker felt that this was being used by the Executive, and was not a genuine question by an MLA, he might refuse this option.
- (c) **A statement.**

This final form exposes Ministers to an hour of questioning. A private notice question only involves the answering of one supplementary. A statement however is made earlier in the day, while a PNQ would be made at 4.00 pm, which for publicity reasons is of limited use.

An alternative is to use oral questions. Next Monday (21 May) Mr Durkan's first oral question relates to this issue, and is from Mr McGrady. OFMDFM Ministers will have orals on 29 May.

The Nature of the Statement

- 4. We will be putting papers to the Executive for this Thursday, giving an overview of the publicity that can now be put in place in relation to

the DFP proposal for a Hardship Scheme. As was suggested in the earlier paper to the Executive there is strong merit in placing the Hardship Scheme in the context of a wider range of initiatives that are taking place, some of them already announced, some of them new. We should for example take credit for the £1m available for Tourism Regeneration which is of course more significant proportionately in Northern Ireland than in GB. Further, DETI is now preparing for widescale advisory assistance to small businesses organised through the five regional LEDU offices, thereby replicating the sort of advisory assistance which has been foreseen in GB. All this points to the potential of any PNQ or statement taking a slightly wider aspect than simply the Hardship Scheme itself. The latter undoubtedly is the major initiative, and for a region that has seen comparatively less economic impact than say Devon and Cumbria, our scheme can stand as a significant initiative by the Executive. We have however to avoid over-egging the pudding.

Ministerial responsibility

5. The nature of the announcement that might be made would have implications for the ministerial responsibility. If one is presenting the wider range of initiatives there is clear logic for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to be involved. Even if one is mainly to confine it to the Hardship Scheme, their involvement is also logical because as well as DFP, which will deal with the rating aspects, DETI, and to a smaller extent DARD and DCAL are involved, therefore it is a cross-cutting issue.