

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Finance

EXTENSION OF THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT AGREED FOR DERRY CITY AND STRABANE DISTRICT TO ALL AREAS

Published on Tuesday 20 October 2020.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): I wish to provide Members of decisions taken by the Executive on 15 October 2020 on the provision of financial assistance to be paid to businesses most directly affected by the essential actions outlined to the Assembly by the First and deputy First Minister on 14 October 2020. They indicated then that the Executive would be working on supports as a matter of priority.

Support Scheme

This Statement provides details of a first support scheme.

The Executive previously agreed a financial support package for Derry City and Strabane District Council area. The regulations (The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020) to allow the financial assistance to be paid to businesses in Derry and Strabane were laid on Wednesday. Those regulations are directly linked to The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. Consequential amendments to the Health regulations will continue to be linked with the financial support scheme. The scheme opened to applications on 14 October.

The Executive has now agreed that the scheme agreed for Derry and Strabane should be extended to all districts with effect from Monday 19 October. I will now ensure that amendments are made to the Financial Regulations at the earliest possible opportunity this week to incorporate the revised levels of support and to link with the revised restrictions that came into operation on Friday evening.

Eligibility

The definitive list of all the revised restrictions are in Amendment No 9 of the Health Protection Regulations made on 16 October 2020.

The Department's Scheme seeks to support those businesses using commercial premises now significantly restricted in use or now forced to close directly by these new Regulations. These include:

- Cafes, pubs and restaurants that are required to close or limit their services to a takeaway service instead;
- Hotels, guest houses and registered Bed and Breakfasts;
- Close contact services detailed in the Health Protection Regulations which use commercial premises;
- Indoor visitor attractions;
- Other businesses which under the Health Protection Regulations are required to cease to carry on that business or service, such as; campsites and caravan parks for touring

caravans, cinemas, museums and galleries, bingo halls, funfairs, inflatable parks, indoor amusement arcades and skating rinks.

The Department will look carefully at every application; it is not possible to outline every scenario at this stage given that the new Health Regulations only came into force on Friday 16 October.

I am keen to roll out the current scheme to all areas so the majority of businesses affected by the new restrictions get financial support as quickly as possible.

Levels of Support

The Executive has further agreed that we double the levels of financial assistance made to qualifying businesses. The new rates will be as follows:

£800 per week for businesses in properties with a Net Annual Value of £15,000 or less and businesses that are joint occupant of a property with any NAV;

£1,200 per week for medium sized businesses in properties with a Net Annual Value between £15,001 and £51,000; and

£1,600 per week for businesses in properties with a Net Annual Value of £51,001 or more.

Businesses in the Derry and Strabane Council area who have already applied to the scheme do not need to re-apply - they will automatically receive the higher payment.

Financial Implications

The costs of the scheme for 4 weeks are estimated at £35 million. DoF will deliver the scheme through its Land and Property Services and DoF has been allocated £35m for this purpose.

Other support

The extension of this scheme across the North means that it can be implemented almost immediately. It opened for applications on Monday 19 October.

The construction of the financial assistance scheme – which is linked directly to the Health Protection regulations – means that it is not a suitable vehicle to deliver support to those businesses and sectors which have been indirectly affected by the restrictions.

I know there are many businesses who haven't benefitted from previous support schemes. I have encouraged Executive colleagues to urgently bring forward proposals for sectors they have responsibility for.

CONOR MURPHY
MINISTER OF FINANCE