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FROM: EDWIN POOTS MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

DATE: 18 May 2020

TO: Conor Murphy MLA
Minister of Finance

DRAFT EXECUTIVE PAPER – COVID-10 UPDATE ON FINANCIAL POSITION

Thank you for sight of your paper and I welcome the proposed allocations of £25m for market interventions in the Agri Food Sector and of £3.8m for Waste in Councils. I also welcome the proposed additional support for businesses through the rating system. However, the rationale for giving local Government essentially everything they sought when they have extensive reserves is unclear. Councils have the capacity to absorb the financial pain of COVID-19 better than the farmers, and indeed businesses.

I am also very disappointed that more could not be provided to primary producers in the dairy, beef and horticulture sectors as well as to AFBI for its COVID-19 Testing Kits.

I note your proposal to consider Business Rates Support separately with £119.9m being held for this. I also note that there are a number of wider uncertainties including the level of funding which may ultimately be provided for PPE, the outcome of the reprioritisation exercise and the actual cost of the current business grant schemes where payments to date are £120m less than the £370m allocated for these grants.

Therefore I believe that more funding could be allocated to departments now.

There is a very strong economic rationale for providing financial assistance to farm and horticulture businesses to enable them to deal with short term issues that substantially threaten otherwise viable businesses. My market intervention proposals only help cover production costs and it is crucial that a further £10m is allocated to support these sectors over the coming months.

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My Department also responded to the call to help the health service with the important additional work that AFBI is undertaking to support our citizens with testing at this time. Funding this £1.3m pressure would recognise the corporate approach we as an Executive are taking to manage this pandemic.

I urge you and Executive colleagues to provide these two areas with additional financial assistance.

This memo has been copied to Ministerial Colleagues, the Attorney General, the Office of the First Legislative Counsel and the Executive Secretariat.

Personal Data

EDWIN POOTS MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

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